

PREVENTING SUICIDE:

information
for teachers
and other people
working in schools



Suicide is one of the leading causes of death among 15-19 year-olds. Half of all mental health conditions in adulthood start by 14 years of age. For many young people, the teenage years are a time of exploring new opportunities and freedoms, but they can also be a time of anxiety about academic performance, relationships and the future.

Occasional emotional distress is normal in adolescence, but for some young people, if the distress becomes long-lasting or overwhelming, it can lead to difficulty in everyday functioning and, in the most tragic cases, suicide.

Here is some advice for helping young people

Signs to look out for among students

- Expressing thoughts, feelings or plans about ending their life, including through stories or pictures;
 - a sudden or dramatic change in academic performance;
 - changes in mood, for example regularly becoming tearful, crying, or displaying severe emotional distress;
 - expressing hopelessness about the future;
 - changes in behaviour such as a withdrawal from others, loss of interest in activities they usually enjoy, or an increase in anger, hostility, agitation, irritability or impulsivity;
 - disruptive behavior, including conflict with other students or school staff;
 - an increase in absences from school or difficulty in concentrating during lessons;
 - use of alcohol or drugs; and/or
 - bullying or breakdown of relationships with peers.
- Pay particular attention to changes in mood and behaviour at times of stress, for example in the lead-up to exams or before or during other major changes in a student's life.

What you can do if you are worried

- Talk to the student in a private space, conveying your concerns, and actively listen to what they say without judgment.
- Encourage the student to speak to someone they trust, such as a parent or other trusted family member, adult or health worker at the school. Offer to speak with the person identified but do not do so unless the student agrees.
- If the student has attempted to, or indicates that they are about to, intentionally harm themselves, seek immediate support from health services, either within the school system (such as a school counsellor or nurse) or in the community. Do not leave the student alone.

What you can do as head of a school

- Organize information sessions and mental health promotion activities for students to support their mental health and well-being, and provide training sessions to enhance students' cognitive, emotional and social skills to help them cope with stressful situations.
- Organize training for staff on recognizing and managing mental distress and looking out for signs that a student may be at risk of suicide.
- Create a culture at school that promotes the sharing of difficulties related to mental health.
- Organize and encourage activities that promote the good mental health of staff members.
- Design and implement a plan for how to sensitively manage and communicate the suicide or suicide attempt of a student or a member of staff to the school community in a way that minimizes further distress. Measures should include the availability of trained health workers and support services for students, parents, and staff.

**More
information**



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a resource for teachers and
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