

YOUTH SUICIDE

Suicide is not listed in the DSM-IV-TR as a mental health disorder; however, it is often directly linked to mental health, most commonly depression (Gerrig & Zimbardo, 2008). Suicide is the third leading cause of death of people ages 15 to 24. The first two are accidents and homicides. Among college students suicide is the second leading cause of death preceded only by accidents. Suicide before the age of 12 or the onset of puberty is rare. Girls are twice as likely as boys to attempt suicide but boys are four times more likely to succeed (Eggen & Kauchak, 2013). Students who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender (GLBT) are significantly more likely to attempt suicide than heterosexual young people (21.5% vs 4.2%), (Hatzenbuehler, 2011). The negative social environment that adolescents who are GLBT face may contribute to this.

Figure 7.9 contains a list of risk factors associated with suicidal behavior in adolescents (Evens, et, al., 2005). The best predictor of suicide is previous suicide attempts, followed by depression that accompanied by strong feelings of helpless and hopelessness (Craig & Baucum, 2002). Warning signs for possible suicides are listed in Figure 7.10.

Figure 7.9. Risk factors association with suicidal behavior in adolescents.

<p><i>Psychopathology</i> Depression Drug and alcohol abuse Aggressive-impulsive behavior Hopelessness Pessimism Conduct disorder (males) Panic disorder (females)</p> <p><i>Environment</i> Firearm availability Diminished family cohesion Lack of parental support Parent-child conflict Negative life events Child sex abuse Suicide contagion</p> <p><i>Previous Suicidal Behavior</i> Suicide attempts</p> <p><i>Sexual Orientation</i> Same-sex sexual orientation</p>

Figure 7.10. Warning signs for adolescent suicide.

- Withdrawal from relationships
- Withdrawal from friends or classroom and school activities
- Depression, as evidenced by persistent boredom or lack of interest in school activities
- An abrupt decline in the quality of schoolwork.
- Talking about death, the hereafter, or suicide
- Giving away prized possessions; drug or alcohol abuse, personality changes such as a rise in anger, boredom, or apathy
- Comments about suicide as a solution to problems
- Unusual neglect of appearance or radical changes in personality
- Difficulty concentrating at school
- Staying away from school or other usual activities
- Complaints of physical problems when nothing is wrong
- Changes in eat or sleeping habits (Eggen & Kauchak, 2013; Papalia, Olds, & Feldman, 2004)

Andrew P. Johnson, Ph.D.
Minnesota State University, Mankato
www.OPDT-Johnson.com
dr.andy@charter.net