



KidsHealth.org/classroom

Teacher's Guide

This guide includes:

- Standards
- Related Links
- Discussion Questions
- Activities for Students
- Reproducible Materials

Standards

This guide correlates with the following National Health Education Standards:

Students will:

- Comprehend concepts related to health promotion and disease prevention to enhance health.
- Analyze the influence of family, peers, culture, media, technology, and other factors on health behaviors.
- Demonstrate the ability to access valid information and products and services to enhance health.
- Demonstrate the ability to use interpersonal communication skills to enhance health and avoid or reduce health risks.
- Demonstrate the ability to use decision-making skills to enhance health.
- Demonstrate the ability to use goal-setting skills to enhance health.
- Demonstrate the ability to practice health-enhancing behaviors and avoid or reduce health risks.
- Demonstrate the ability to advocate for personal, family, and community health.

National Health Education Standards: www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/sher/standards/index.htm

Suicide is the third-leading cause of death for teens, after accidents and homicide. About 1 in 15 high school students attempt suicide each year, and roughly 1 in 50 make an attempt serious enough to require medical attention. Peers and teachers are often the first ones to notice the warning signs - if they know what to look for. These activities will help your students understand when and how to get help for themselves or classmates.

Related KidsHealth Links

Articles for Teens:

Suicide

TeensHealth.org/teen/your_mind/mental_health/suicide.html

My Friend Is Talking About Suicide. What Should I Do?

TeensHealth.org/teen/school_jobs/good_friends/talking_about_suicide.html

I'm Thinking of Suicide. How Can I Stop?

TeensHealth.org/teen/expert/depression/stop_suicide.html

When Depression Is Severe

TeensHealth.org/teen/your_mind/feeling_sad/severe_depression.html

Getting Help for Intense Grief

TeensHealth.org/teen/your_mind/emotions/intense-grief.html

School Counselors

TeensHealth.org/teen/school_jobs/school/school_counselors.html

Is It OK to Talk to a Teacher About Personal Problems?

TeensHealth.org/teen/homework/problems/teacher_talk.html

Going to a Therapist

TeensHealth.org/teen/your_mind/feeling_sad/therapist.html

Finding Low-Cost Mental Health Care

TeensHealth.org/teen/your_mind/problems/mhealth_care.html

Discussion Questions

Note: The following questions are written in language appropriate for sharing with your students.

1. The teen suicide rate peaks around mid-adolescence. What is it about these years that might make a teen more susceptible to suicide? What factors put some teens more at risk than others?
2. Teens who are thinking of committing suicide often show warning signs. What might they do or say?
3. If you spot the warning signs of suicide in a friend, should you wait it out or say something? What are helpful things to say? What are not helpful things to say?
4. Suicide is a difficult topic to talk about. How can we overcome the stigma so that people can get the help they need?



Activities for Students

Note: The following activities are written in language appropriate for sharing with your students.

Safe Haven

Objective:

Students will:

- Research and demonstrate their knowledge of the risk factors and warning signs of suicide

Materials:

- “Safe Haven” handout
- Art supplies and/or computer and PSA templates (available free online) and/or video equipment

Class Time:

- 1 hour

Activity:

[Note to instructor: Students can work on this individually or in small groups.] To help classmates who might be feeling overwhelmed, depressed, or hopeless, we’re going to lay some of the groundwork needed to create a peer counseling group that would provide a safe and supportive place for teens to get help.

First, think of a name for your group. Then do some research to gather information about suicide that will help you create educational materials - for a brochure, poster, factsheet, video, or infographic, etc. - that could be used to get the message out about your new support group. Topics should include:

- Statistics on teen suicide
- Who is at risk
- List of warning signs
- What to do if you suspect someone is considering suicide
- Where to get help

[Your students can review “5 Ways to Make Online Research Easier,” [TeensHealth.org/teen/school_jobs/school/online_research.html](https://www.teenshealth.org/teen/school_jobs/school/online_research.html), before starting their research.]

Extensions:

1. If your school doesn’t have a peer counseling group, encourage students to work with a school counselor or school psychologist to create one, as well as videos, infographics, brochures, posters, or factsheets for the group to use in its outreach efforts. If your school already has a group, encourage your students to join or create educational materials for the group to use.
2. Host a guest speaker with experience in suicide prevention, such as psychologist, social worker, or suicide hotline staffer. School counselors, school psychologists, or school nurses may be able to help find a speaker or even give a presentation to your class, grade, or school themselves.



Red Flags

Objectives:

Students will:

- Read brief scenarios of teens considering suicide
- Demonstrate their understanding of risk factors and warning signs of suicide by spotting them in the scenarios

Materials:

- Pen or pencil
- “Red Flags” handout

Class Time:

- 45 minutes

Activity:

Teens who attempt suicide often give some type of warning ahead of time. Sometimes it’s what they say, such as “I have nothing to live for” or “Everyone would be better off without me.” Other times, the signs are more subtle, like feeling really sad for weeks or months, withdrawing from friends and activities, engaging in risky or self-destructive behaviors, or changing eating and sleeping habits. All of these warning signs can be signs of depression, which is a risk factor for suicide. Suicide isn’t always preventable, but we still need to know what a cry for help sounds like. Even it’s a whisper.

Today, we’re going to practice looking for red flags in various scenarios. For each character on the “Red Flags” handout, write down any words or actions that you believe show the person is at risk for suicide. Also write what you could do to help in each situation. Afterward, we’ll share our responses.

Reproducible Materials

Handout: Safe Haven

[KidsHealth.org/classroom/9to12/problems/emotions/suicide_prevention_handout1.pdf](https://www.kidshealth.org/classroom/9to12/problems/emotions/suicide_prevention_handout1.pdf)

Handout: Red Flags

[KidsHealth.org/classroom/9to12/problems/emotions/suicide_prevention_handout2.pdf](https://www.kidshealth.org/classroom/9to12/problems/emotions/suicide_prevention_handout2.pdf)

Quiz: Suicide Prevention

[KidsHealth.org/classroom/9to12/problems/emotions/suicide_prevention_quiz.pdf](https://www.kidshealth.org/classroom/9to12/problems/emotions/suicide_prevention_quiz.pdf)

Answer Key: Suicide Prevention

[KidsHealth.org/classroom/9to12/problems/emotions/suicide_prevention_quiz_answers.pdf](https://www.kidshealth.org/classroom/9to12/problems/emotions/suicide_prevention_quiz_answers.pdf)



Name: _____

Date: _____

Safe Haven

Instructions: Gather information about suicide that could be used to create a teen-friendly educational brochure, poster, factsheet, video, or infographic, etc.

Statistics:

Who's at risk:

Warning signs:

What to do if you suspect someone is considering suicide:

Where to get help:



Name: _____

Date: _____

Red Flags

Instructions: For each scenario below, write down any words or actions that you believe show the character might be at risk for suicide. (Red flags = warning signs.) Also write what you could do to help in each situation.

1. Leila hasn't been the same since her mom died. It's been especially tough because she doesn't get along with her dad. For months, she's been saying that if it weren't for her boyfriend, Dillon, she wouldn't have anyone who cares about her. But Dillon just broke up with her and Leila is devastated. She talks about needing to end her pain and just last night told you where the key to her diary was in case anyone wants to read it "afterward."

Red flags: _____

How I could help: _____

2. Oliver comes from a family of perfectionists. In Oliver's family, the expectation is that he'll go to an Ivy League college, just like his parents and his sister did. But he just took his SATs for the third time and his scores aren't high enough. He thinks his grades might drop this semester, too. He's so worried about not getting into a top college and letting his family down that he hasn't been able to sleep or eat. His parents also grounded him for getting the family car in a fender-bender. Without access to a car he lost his part-time job delivering pizzas. He keeps saying how he's tired of feeling like a disappointment and he sees no way out.

Red flags: _____

How I could help: _____



Name: _____

Date: _____

Red Flags

3. Ben is the most talented actor at school, but he didn't show for rehearsals this week and hasn't told anyone why. You thought he might have the flu or something like that, until you see him under the bleachers after school. He's totally drunk. When you ask him what's going on, he confides that he recently came out to his parents and it didn't go well. They told him to get out of the house. He's staying with his aunt for now, and he just found out she keeps a gun in her nightstand. He says he bets his parents wouldn't even miss him if he were gone.

Red flags: _____

How I could help: _____

4. When Jolie's cousin Mara, who was more like a sister to her, committed suicide, Jolie was the one to find her. Jolie says that since then, no matter how hard she tries to move on, she feels like she's just going through the motions. Her grades dropped and never went back up. She also quit field hockey and track and hasn't played sports since. Soon it will be 1-year anniversary of Mara's death, and Jolie's friends have been trying to keep her mind off of it. They invite her places, but she never goes. They text her, but she turns off her phone. Last night she tweeted, "Mara had it right. #abetterplace."

Red flags: _____

How I could help: _____



Name: _____

Date: _____

Red Flags

5. Charles hates school because he gets bullied a lot. He has ADHD and has repeated a grade. Charles used to spend a lot of time playing video games with his older brother, Robert. But Robert joined the Army, and now Charles spends most of his time alone. Sometimes he skips school and it seems like when he's not sleeping, he's eating. He tells you that he'd like to talk more with his mom, but she's exhausted when she gets home from her second job. He says he'd probably be doing her a favor if she didn't have to worry about him anymore.

Red flags: _____

How I could help: _____



Name: _____

Date: _____

Quiz

Instructions: Answer each question.

1. List four factors that can increase a teen's risk of suicide:

2. True or false: If a person talks about suicide, it means he or she is just looking for attention and won't go through with it.

3. True or false: The danger of suicide has passed when a person begins to cheer up.

4. List four warning signs that someone is thinking about suicide:

5. True or false: Once a person is suicidal, he or she is suicidal forever.

6. True or false: Most teens who attempt suicide really intend to die.

7. True or false: If a friend tells you she's considering suicide and swears you to secrecy, you have to keep your promise.

8. True or false: The risk of suicide increases dramatically when teens have access to guns at home.

9. If you or a friend is feeling suicidal, as soon as possible, it's best to call a suicide crisis line (800-SUICIDE), 911, or talk to:

- a) a parent or relative
- b) a school counselor, teacher, or coach
- c) a therapist
- d) a religious leader
- e) anyone above

10. If your friend is suicidal, it's least helpful to say:

- a) Don't worry, this will blow over by tomorrow
- b) I'm concerned about you
- c) I know where we can get help
- d) I'm going to stay with you



Quiz Answer Key

1. List four factors that can increase a teen's risk of suicide:

Any four of the following: a psychological disorder, especially depression, bipolar disorder, and alcohol and/or drug use; feelings of hopelessness and worthlessness; previous suicide attempt; family history of depression or suicide; emotional, physical, or sexual abuse; lack of a support network, poor relationships with parents or peers, and feelings of social isolation; dealing with bisexuality or homosexuality in an unsupportive family or community or hostile school environment; perfectionism.

2. True or false: If a person talks about suicide, it means he or she is just looking for attention and won't go through with it.

3. True or false: The danger of suicide has passed when a person begins to cheer up.

4. List four warning signs that someone is thinking about suicide:

Any four of the following: talking about suicide or death in general; hinting he/she might not be around anymore; talking about feeling hopeless or feeling guilty; pulling away from friends or family; writing songs, poems, or letters about death, separation, or loss; giving away treasured possessions; losing the desire to do favorite things or activities; having trouble concentrating or thinking clearly; changing eating or sleeping habits; engaging in risky or self-destructive behaviors; losing interest in school and/or extra-curricular activities.

5. True or false: Once a person is suicidal, he or she is suicidal forever.

6. True or false: Most teens who attempt suicide really intend to die.

7. True or false: If a friend tells you she's considering suicide and swears you to secrecy, you have to keep your promise.

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