

Practice Note: Youth Suicide

This practice note is to assist practitioners in providing information to the families they work with, to share with colleagues and other community professionals and to support the work they do to keep children and families safe. Suicide is the second highest cause of death in Canada for youth between the ages of 10-24 and is estimated to be five to seven times higher for Aboriginal youth. On average, 294 youths die from suicide each year and many more attempt suicide. Depending on the community they live in and their self-esteem, many Aboriginal, gay and lesbian teens may be at particularly high risk.

Warning Signs

Youth suicide and suicidal thoughts or behaviour might seem like it appears out of the blue, but in reality, youth almost always present prior warning signs. The following signs could be clues that a youth might be considering suicide.

(* Indicates the more serious warning signs)

- Signs of depression or feelings of hopelessness
- Lack of interest or energy (or wild variations in energy levels)
- Changes in eating habits or sleep patterns
- Loss of concern about personal appearance
- Increase in anxiety or anxiety related illnesses (headaches, stomach aches)
- Any dramatic changes in behaviour, actions, or attitude
- Being unusually quiet or unusually aggressive/angry
- Dropping out of hobbies, sports, school, or job
- Talking about death or cult figures who died by suicide
- Preoccupation with death, dying, or suicide *
- Expressing a preoccupation with death or suicide *(creative writing, poetry, artwork)
- Making jokes about death or suicide *
- A sudden elated mood following a time of depression *
- A previous suicide attempt *
- Serious talk of suicide or making a plan *
- Engaging in risk taking behaviour (driving recklessly, unsafe sex) *
- Increase in alcohol or drug use *
- Giving away prize possessions, saying good-bye, writing a will, writing farewell letters *

http://www.youthsuicide.ca/adult_questions/warning_signs.htm

Additional Resources

There are numerous resources available to the public on youth suicide. Below is a list of some of these resources related to suicide among Aboriginal, non-Aboriginal and gay/lesbian youth.

Youth Suicide Prevention Website

This website provides resources and additional links for parents, caregivers and friends of suicidal youth.

<http://www.youthsuicide.ca/>

Health Canada

This website provides facts on suicide rates for First Nations and Inuit youth in Canada. Also available is a downloadable report *Acting on What We Know: Preventing Youth Suicide in First Nations*.

<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fniah-spnia/promotion/suicide/index-eng.php>

Centre for Suicide Prevention

This website provides access to training workshops and many additional resources such as toolkits, handouts, and brochures available for purchase or download.

<http://suicideinfo.ca/>

