

Youth Suicide: Populations at Elevated Risk

Depression and suicidal thoughts can affect anyone; however, research shows that certain groups of youth are at elevated risk for suicidal behavior.

Youth living with mental health and or substance use disorders. While the large majority of people with mental disorders do not engage in suicidal behavior, people with mental health disorders account for more than 90 percent of deaths by suicide. Depression and substance use disorders are commonly linked to youth suicide and many youth are not engaged in treatment. Finding treatment for young people living with mental health disorders is a critical step in suicide prevention.

Youth who have attempted suicide. A previous suicide attempt is a key risk factor for eventual suicide death. Many adolescents who have attempted suicide do not receive necessary follow up care. If someone has attempted suicide in the past, long term mental health care is important to maintain positive steps made after the attempt.

Youth who engage in non-suicidal self-injury. While most youth who engage in self-injury (commonly called "cutting"), do not report feeling suicidal, research shows that they are at elevated risk of becoming suicidal down the road. Self-injury is generally a coping mechanism for youth struggling with psychological pain. It is important to seek mental health treatment for a child who is self-injuring as soon as possible so that they can work to find better ways to cope.

Youth in out-of-home settings/experiencing homelessness. Youth involved in the juvenile justice or child welfare systems often have many risk factors for suicide. Homeless young people also face a number of stressors and have higher rates of mood disorders, conduct disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder, and suicide attempts.

LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning) youth. Suicidal behavior among LGBTQ youth can be related to experiences of discrimination, family rejection, harassment, bullying, violence, and victimization. For youth already experiencing other risk factors such as mental illness, these experiences can place them at increased risk. Family acceptance of a young person's orientation is a key protective factor for LGBTQ youth.

Youth impacted by suicide. Studies show that those who have experienced suicide loss, through the death of a friend or loved one, are at increased risk for suicide

themselves. If there is a suicide in your school or community, it is important to facilitate healthy grieving and reduce risk for other students.

Youth living with medical conditions and disabilities. A number of physical conditions are associated with an elevated risk for suicidal behavior including chronic pain, loss of mobility, disfigurement, cognitive styles that make problem-solving a challenge, and other chronic limitations. Adolescents with asthma are more likely to report suicidal ideation and behavior than those without asthma. Additionally, studies show that suicide rates are significantly higher among people with certain types of disabilities, such as those with multiple sclerosis or spinal cord injuries.

If you are concerned about a young person in your life, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is always available. Contact 1-800-273-8255 24/7, for free and confidential support for people in distress, prevention and crisis resources for you or your loved ones.

Adapted from: The Model School District Policy on Suicide Prevention developed by the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, the American School Counselor Association, the National Association of School Psychologists, and The Trevor Project.