

# SUICIDE RISK FACTORS

## 1. Age and Sex

The risk is greater if the youth is male rather than female, and for boys between the ages of 15 and 25 and girls between 10 and 16. The risk is greater if the youth is gay, lesbian, or bisexual.

## 2. Prior History of Suicidal Behavior

The risk is greater if the youth has attempted suicide in the past or has made repeated threats of suicide.

## 3. Symptoms

The risk is greater if the youth displays symptoms of depression, ADHD, conduct disorder, or engages in chemical abuse. Symptoms include sleep disturbances, feelings of hopelessness, powerlessness and isolation, intense rage, impulsive behavior, hostility, intense anger, perfectionism, anxiety and significant acting out.

## 4. Behavioral Characteristics

The risk is greater if the youth is socially isolated and alienated. The youth may feel he/she has no close friends or confidants. Runaways are also at a greater risk for suicidal behavior, as are teens involved in Satanism.

## 5. Family Characteristics

The risk is greater if there is a significant change in the family such as death, separation or divorce. Also contributing to a higher risk are: parental dysfunction, mental illness, suicidality, abuse and neglect, substance abuse, depression, and family violence.

## 6. Stressful Life Events

The risk is greater if the youth has overwhelming concerns about sexuality, extreme pressure to succeed, history of family suicide, serious illness, or personal loss either in the family or with a peer.

## 7. Cognitive Strategies

The risk is greater if the youth has poor coping skills or poor problem solving ability which can include distorted patterns of thinking, impulsivity, feelings of hopelessness and lack of control, “black and white” thinking, and rigidity.

## 8. Immediate versus Long-Term Aspects

The immediate risk is greater if the youth suddenly experiences an overwhelming number of the above symptoms. The long-term risk is greater if there is a recurrence of symptoms or an increase in maladaptive behavior.

## **SUICIDE RISK FACTORS (CONTINUED)**

### **9. Suicidal Plan**

Availability of means, increased lethality of method, and a detailed plan increase risk for suicide.

### **10. Communication, Support, and Resources**

The risk is greater if the youth cannot communicate with peers or adults and lack support in the home and at school.