

SUICIDE: Suicide Among College Students

- The rate of completed suicide for college students, according to a major study of suicides on Big Ten college campuses (1997) was 7.5 per 100,000.
- It is estimated that there are more than 1,000 suicides on college campuses per year.
- One in 12 college students has made a suicide plan.
- In 2000, the American College Health Association surveyed 16,000 college students from 28 college campuses.
 - 9.5% of students had seriously contemplated suicide.
 - 1.5% had made a suicide attempt.
 - In the twelve month period prior to the survey, half of the sample reported feeling very sad, one third reported feeling hopeless and 22% reported feeling so depressed as to not be able to function.
 - Of the 16,000 students surveyed, only 6.2% of males and 12.8% of females reported a diagnosis of depression. Therefore, there are a large number of students who are not receiving adequate treatment and/or who remain undiagnosed.
 - Of the students who had seriously considered suicide, 94.8% reported feeling so sad to the point of not functioning at least once in the past year, and 94.4% reported feelings of hopelessness.
- Two groups of students might be at higher risk for suicide:
 - Students with a pre-existing (before college) mental health condition, and
 - Students who develop a mental health condition while in college.
 - Within these groups, students who are male, Asian and Hispanic, under the age of 21 are more likely to experience suicide ideation and attempts.
- Reasons attributed to the appearance or increase of symptoms/disorders:
 - New and unfamiliar environment;
 - Academic and social pressures;
 - Feelings of failure or decreased performance;
 - Alienation;
 - Family history of mental illness;
 - Lack adequate coping skills;
 - Difficulties adjusting to new demands and different work loads.
- • Risk factors for suicide in college students include depression, sadness, hopelessness, and stress.
- • As with the general population, depression plays a large role in suicide. “Ten percent of college students have been diagnosed with depression” (NMHA, 2001). “The vast majority of young adults aged 18 and older who are diagnosed with depression do not receive appropriate or even any treatment at all”.

Sources - This information was gathered from:

Safeguarding your Students Against Suicide - Expanding the Safety Net: Proceedings from an Expert Panel on Vulnerability, Depressive Symptoms, and Suicidal Behavior on College Campuses (2002), a report co-sponsored by the National Mental Health Association (NMHA) and the Jed Foundation.

Suicide Prevention Resource Center. (2004). **Promoting Mental Health and Preventing Suicide in College and University Settings**. Newton, MA: Education Development Center, Inc.

The Jed Foundation and the National Mental Health Association websites.

FIVE CAUSES FOR SUICIDE AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS

1. IDENTITY PROBLEMS:

The students are unable to adapt to the freedom of college. They may not be able to resolve the conflict between their morals and peer pressure.

2. ACADEMIC COMPETITION:

Students have a difficult time with the demands of classes and of grades. This is especially true with students who achieved good grades in high school and then find themselves failing in college.

3. SOCIAL ISOLATION:

College can be a very lonely experience. If the student does not resolve this, it can grow into a major problem.

4. FINANCIAL PRESSURE:

For some college students, they feel that their financial problems with paying for school and lodging are never ending.

5. DEPRESSION:

This includes any specific reason or collection of reasons of the student to become severely depressed.

**** ADDITIONAL RESOURCES ABOUT SUICIDE CAN BE FOUND ON WWW.ULIFELINE.COM AND WWW.HALFOFUS.COM****

SUGGESTIONS FOR COMMUNICATING WITH A PERSON WHO IS EXPERIENCING SUICIDAL THOUGHTS

- Let them know that you are concerned and care about them.
- Deal directly with the topic of suicide. Avoid using euphemisms like “doing something foolish to yourself.” The person will most likely appreciate your concern and your openness may help reduce his/her anxiety.
- Remain calm, listen, and be supportive.
- Recognize your own limitation; Notify your RD and/or Student Life Residence Life Staff.
- **If you think the situation is nearing crisis, do not handle the matter alone.** Encourage the person to contact friends, family and/or significant others, Counseling Services. Offer to help contact Counseling Services and offer to walk them to our office.
- Be sure to follow through with the suicidal person. Many suicides occur after the depression appears to lift.
- Use questions that force the person to concentrate on positive resources and on contributions that they have made.
- In the case of suicide risk, you **MAY** have to betray a confidence. **DO NOT BOX YOURSELF IN WITH PROMISES.** Do not promise what cannot be guaranteed.
- Whenever you are in a difficult situation because someone has disclosed something to you that you do not feel qualified to handle, say what you are feeling. Examples might be:
 - I am feeling a little uncomfortable because I am really concerned about you and want to make sure you are okay.
 - I appreciate your sharing with me. I feel that there is a right answer or response, but I really do not know what to say. I do know that there are staff members here at the University who can help you.
 - I am glad you came to me for help. I am not qualified to help you but would like to help you find someone who can.
 - Some of the things you have said really concern me.
- Even the most caring person often feels uncomfortable asking someone if they are depressed. If you really want to know how someone is doing you are going to have to ask real questions, going beyond the light conversation that you may have with some of your residents. Rather than asking how are you doing, ask someone to tell you about his/her day. Ask open-ended questions that stimulate a response other than yes or no or other one-word answers. Other possible questions that you can tailor to your personality and the specific situation are:
 - When was the last time you were happy?
 - What are you looking forward to?
 - What kind of problems are you having?
 - Who are you talking to for help?
 - When is the last time you did something fun?