

*Indiana legislation requires training on suicide prevention. It requires teacher training on the prevention of child suicide and the recognition of signs that a student may be considering suicide. It also provides that after June 30, 2013, an individual may not receive an initial teaching license unless the individual has completed training on suicide prevention and the recognition of signs that a student may be considering suicide.*

## **Understand your role**

As a teacher, you have an important role to play. You have day-to-day contact with many young people; some have problems that could result in serious injury or even death by their own hand. You are therefore able to observe students' behavior and act when you suspect a student may be at risk of self-harm.

Teachers can also play an active role in suicide prevention by fostering the emotional well-being of all students—not just those already at high risk. Teachers are well positioned to promote a feeling of connectedness and belonging in the school community. According to the CDC (2009), school connectedness is the belief by students that adults and peers in the school care about them as individuals as well as about their learning. Connectedness is an important factor in improving academic achievement and healthy behaviors, and it is also specifically related to reductions in suicidal thoughts and attempts (Resnick et al., 1997; Blum et al., 2002).

## **Identify Students Who May Be at Risk for Suicide**

Be alert to the problems facing your students. Your position gives you an opportunity to become aware of problems facing your students that may put them at risk for suicide. Researchers have identified a large number of risk factors for suicide. The most significant ones are:

- Prior suicide attempt(s)
- Substance abuse
- Mood disorders
- Access to lethal means

Other risk factors include the following circumstances and problems:

- Recent death of a friend, especially if by suicide
- Recent death of or separation from a family member
- Engaging in self-harm
- Problems in school (academic and/or discipline)
- Relationship problems or breakups
- Bullying or other forms of violence
- Discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender nonconformity
- Family problems or abuse, current or in the past
- Legal issues
- Serious illness or injury
- Other stressful events

Note: Suicide risk is generally greater among individuals with multiple risk factors.  
(Adapted from Rodgers, 2011)

## **Watch for signs of immediate risk for suicide**

Some behaviors may indicate a person is at immediate risk for suicide. These three should prompt immediate action:

- **Talking about wanting to die or to kill oneself**
- **Looking for a way to kill oneself, such as searching online or obtaining a gun**
- **Talking about feeling hopeless or having no reason to live**

Other behaviors may also indicate a serious risk—especially if the behavior is new; has increased; and/or seems related to a painful event, loss, or change.

- Talking about feeling trapped or in unbearable pain
- Talking about being a burden to others
- Increasing the use of alcohol or drugs
- Acting anxious or agitated; behaving recklessly
- Sleeping too little or too much
- Withdrawing or feeling isolated
- Showing rage or talking about seeking revenge
- Displaying extreme mood swings

(Adapted from National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, [n.d.]

## **Respond to Students Who May Be at Risk for Suicide**

Take action if you encounter a student who is at immediate risk. If someone is

- **Talking about wanting to die or to kill oneself**
- **Looking for a way to kill oneself, such as searching online or obtaining a gun**
- **Talking about feeling hopeless or having no reason to live**

Take the following steps right away:

1. Supervise the student constantly or make sure the student is in a secure environment supervised by caring adults until the school counselor can see him or her.
2. Escort the student to see the school counselor.
3. Provide any additional information to the school counselor evaluating the student to help in the assessment process. That person will notify the student's parents if necessary.

(Adapted from Los Angeles Unified School District, 2010)

## **Reach out to a student who may be at risk**

The steps above are an appropriate response to a student showing immediate warning signs. To help the many other students who may be at risk for suicide, take one or both of the following steps, depending on what feels most comfortable to you.

- Talk with the school counselor about your concerns. He or she may decide to obtain information about the student from other school staff to determine how best to help the student.
- Reach out to the student and ask how he or she is doing. Listen without judging. You could mention changes you have noticed in his or her behavior and that you are concerned. If the student is open to talking further with someone, suggest that he or she see the school counselor. Whether or not the student sees the school counselor or other mental health provider, continue to stay connected with the student and pay attention to how he or she is doing. Also stay in touch with the school counselor as needed.

(Adapted from SPTS online course, 2012–2013)