



BSA SAFETY MOMENT

YOUTH SUICIDE PREVENTION

SUMMARY

Youth suicidal behavior is a problem that you may encounter in Scouting or with friends of Scouting youth, but it is often preventable. In order to save the life of a youth at risk, it is important to have a plan in place beforehand, know local professional resources, understand the severity of the problem, look for the signs in the boys you lead, understand major risk factors, and know how you can help.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Youth with risk factors are more likely to engage in suicidal behavior, while youth with protective factors in their families and communities are less likely. While the risk factors don't directly cause the behavior, research with youth who have attempted suicide often show that those factors were present. They include:

- Mental illness
- Substance abuse
- Previous suicide attempts
- Non-suicidal self-injury
- Low self-esteem
- Having a clear plan for suicide
- Having close proximity to a means of killing oneself
- Severe depression
- Loss of a loved one
- Medical problems
- Family or friend rejection
- Sleep or eating problems
- Withdrawing from friends and social activities
- Expressing a sense of hopelessness
- Being a victim of bullying

Protective factors include family and school connectedness, affiliation with religious organizations, safe schools, academic achievement, positive self-esteem, and active involvement in groups that promote a sense of achievement—such as the Boy Scouts of America.

When you suspect that someone might be suicidal:

- If you have a plan in place, follow it.
- Take every threat seriously.
- Don't be afraid to ask whether the person has considered suicide.
- Listen and accept the person at face value.
- Don't give false reassurance.
- Notify the person's parent or guardian and seek professional help.
- Report any abuse to the appropriate authorities.
- One easy way to engage a youth is to simply ask if something is sad, bad, or scary in their life.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline—www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org; telephone: 1-800-273-8255
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention—www.cdc.gov
- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention—www.afsp.org
- American Association of Suicidology—www.suicidology.org