

## Observations about Teen Suicides

- \* The #1 cause of suicide is untreated depression.

This is the key point. Suicide is caused by depression; Depression is an illness that goes untreated because those who suffer are unaware of the cause and/or fear the stigma of "admitting" they have this medical problem.

Most of the time people who kill themselves are very sick with depression or one of the other types of depressive illnesses, which occur when the chemicals in a person's brain get out of balance or become disrupted in some way. Healthy people do not kill themselves.

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Getting depression is involuntary - no one asks for it, just like people don't ask to get cancer or diabetes. But, we do know that depression is a treatable illness. That people can feel good again!

In other words, the stress of school, in itself, does not kill students. Making school "less stressful" does a lot to help students in general, but will probably have minimal impact on depressed or suicidal students.

But, talking about suicide or being aware of a suicide that happened in your family or to a close friend does not put you at risk for attempting it, if you are healthy. The only people who are at risk are those who are vulnerable in the first place - vulnerable because of an illness called depression or one of the other depressive illnesses. The risk increases if the illness is not treated.

Talking about suicide is not "contagious".

Why don't people talk about depression and suicide?

The main reason people don't talk about it is because of the stigma. People who suffer from depression are afraid that others will think they are "crazy", which is so untrue. And society still hasn't accepted depressive illnesses like they've accepted other diseases. Alcoholism is a good example - no one ever wanted to talk openly about that, and now look

at how society views it. It's a disease that most people feel pretty comfortable discussing with others if it's in their family. They talk of the effect it has had on their lives and different treatment plans. And everyone is educated on the dangers of alcohol and on alcohol prevention. As for suicide, it's a topic that has a long history of being taboo - something that should just be forgotten, kind of swept under the rug. And that's why people keep dying. Suicide is so misunderstood by most people, so the myths are perpetuated. And the taboo prevents people from getting help, and prevents society from learning more about suicide and depression. If everyone were educated on these subjects, many lives could be saved.

Schools can help students suffering from depression feel more comfortable with seeking help. People who are role models can come forward and talk about their own depression, how they have gotten help for it, and have thrived despite depression. Class time and counselor time should be devoted to ensuring that students learn more about depression as an illness and have the opportunity to talk to a counselor without stigma.

Will "talking things out" cure depression?

The studies that have been done on "talk therapy" vs. using antidepressant medication have shown that in some mild depressions, talking to a counselor may ease some of the symptoms. But it has been proven that in severe depressions, talking things out will not cure the illness. It's like trying to talk a person out of having a heart attack. It just won't work. Most of the time, the person needs medication. Studies have shown that a combination of psychotherapy (talk therapy) and antidepressant medication is the most effective way of treating most people who suffer from depression.

This is a very important point. You can't "cheer somebody up" when they are suffering from clinical depression, let alone suicidal. You can't just give them wisdom and perspective. They need professional psychological and medical help.

What should I tell students?"

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A more detailed explanation might be: "Our thoughts and

feelings come from our brain, and sometimes a person's brain can get very sick - the sickness can cause a person to feel very badly inside. It also makes a person's thoughts get all jumbled and mixed up, so he can't think clearly. Some people can't think of any other way of stopping the hurt they feel inside. They don't understand that they don't have to feel that way, that they can get help." (It's important to note that there are people who were getting help for their depression and died anyway. Just as in other illnesses, a person can receive the best medical treatment and still not survive.)

Students need to know that the person who died loved them, but that because of the illness, the person may have been unable to convey that to them or think about how the children would feel after the loved one's death. They need to know that the suicide was not their fault, and that nothing they said or did, or didn't say or do, caused the death.

Teen Suicide Santa Clara County Hotline	888-247-7717 (24/7)
Natl. Assoc. of Suicidology	800-suicide
Crisis Line, Santa Clara County (all ages)	408-279-8367
Suicide Hotline, North Santa Clara County	650-494-8420

[www.grievingchild.org](http://www.grievingchild.org) (Dougy Center for Grieving Children)  
[www.centerforloss.com](http://www.centerforloss.com)  
[www.save.org](http://www.save.org) (Suicide Awareness/Voices for Education)

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Kara is the Gothic root of the word "care." It means to reach out, to grieve with, to care, to lament.