

RISK FACTORS IN YOUTH

Risk factors are stressful events, situations or conditions that may increase the likelihood of suicide. Risk factors neither predict nor cause suicide. However, they can affect a person's ability to cope or frame alternative solutions for their problems. How might the following situations affect a person's level of resilience?

Risk Factors for Suicide:

- Mental disorders (mood, anxiety, posttraumatic stress and certain personality disorders)
- Alcohol or substance abuse
- One or more prior suicide attempts
- Easy access to a firearm, pills, other lethal means
- The suicide of a peer or a suicide cluster in the community
- Family history of suicide
- Loss of a loved one or the end of a significant relationship
- History of trauma or abuse

Additional Risk Factors

- Rejection by peers
- Bullying or being bullied at school
- Violence at home or school
- Verbal, emotional or sexual abuse
- Divorce of parents
- Harsh or inconsistent discipline styles
- Lack of support services or access to health care
- Stigma associated with help-seeking behavior
- Certain cultural or religious beliefs (for example, a belief that suicide is a noble solution)
- A serious physical illness
- Lack of life skills (decision-making, problem-solving, conflict or anger management, etc.)
- Academic failure
- Unrealistic expectations of oneself or the inability to accept failure
- Poor impulse control
- Harassment due to race, ethnicity or sexual orientation
- Moving to a new community
- Poverty
- Homelessness
- Incarceration
- Natural disaster

Risk factors do not *predict* a problem because each young person also has many protective factors that contribute to his or her resilience. However, any risk factors that you see in a young person suggest the need to be watchful, to check in, to show you care. They present an opportunity for you to help the person develop assets. When you see too many risk factors piling up plus a change in behavior, it's time to be on the alert for any warning signs. Check in with the young person and be ready to take immediate action.