

When To Worry About Suicide: A Parent's Guide

(NAPSA)—Angie* started noticing some changes with her son, Rob*. He was less involved with school activities and did not seem interested in spending time with his friends. He was quite isolated and seemed sad most of the time. She noticed that his grades were dropping as well and she was becoming increasingly concerned.

Like Angie, many parents wonder if changes in behavior are the result of hormones or teenage drama, hoping that it isn't something more. But when should a parent be worried? When are the changes signs of something more serious happening? How do you know when there might be an increasing risk for self-injury or suicide?

Anyone can feel down for a day or two, but when the feelings linger and other behavior shifts occur, these could be important warning signs for depression. Having a mood disorder, like clinical depression or bipolar disorder, is a significant risk factor for suicide, which is the second leading cause of death for young people ages 15 to 24, following injury. More than 11 percent of adolescents aged 12 to 17 experienced a major depressive episode in the past year, according to the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) report, published annually by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

While Angie recognized that Rob was struggling, her concern intensified when she overheard Rob telling a friend that he had thoughts of killing himself. She was scared and was not sure what to do, but knew she needed to do something to help her son.

Angie decided to talk with Rob's school counselor, who told her that when someone talks about suicide, it should always be taken seriously. The counselor provided a referral to a mental health professional.

Once in counseling, Rob began to open up about other issues.

He had been using alcohol to find relief and rest at night—and the use of alcohol and drugs can heighten the risk of suicide. Alcohol, for example, is a depressant and can intensify feelings for people who are already experiencing depression. In addition, the effects



Suicide warning signs may include having little or no energy, alcohol or drug use, and feeling hopeless or talking about suicide.

of alcohol and drugs can cloud judgment and lead to potentially life-threatening decisions. There is a link between self-medicating with substances and thoughts of suicide, although it isn't clear if one prompts the other.

Rob also revealed that he had been searching the Web for drugs that might cause an overdose—which is also a serious warning sign for suicide. Thankfully, Angie recognized that Rob needed support and treatment, and found him help.

While Angie was most comfortable talking with Rob's guidance counselor, there are many other resources to explore for support. Faith communities, counseling and crisis centers, and physicians may all offer help and provide community resources and referrals. SAMHSA also offers a Treatment Services Locator online (www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov), which can be helpful to find local providers. SAMHSA also offers "A Journey Toward Health & Hope," a handbook that can be helpful for someone who has attempted suicide and for those who are supporting someone who attempted suicide.

Suicide Warning Signs

It is critical to know what suicide warning signs are and how to help. The more of these signs a person shows, the greater the risk:

- Talking about wanting to die
- Looking for a way to kill oneself
- Talking about feeling hopeless or having no reason to live
- Talking about feeling trapped or in unbearable pain

- Talking about being a burden to others
- Increasing the use of alcohol or drugs
- Acting anxious, agitated or reckless
- Sleeping too little or too much
- Having little or no energy
- Withdrawing or feeling isolated
- Showing rage or talking about seeking revenge
- Displaying extreme mood swings.

What to Do

If someone you know exhibits warning signs of suicide, or even if you are not sure but are concerned about them:

- Ask if they are OK or ask if they are having thoughts of suicide
- Express your concern about what you are observing in their behavior
- Listen attentively and non-judgmentally
- Reflect on what they share and let them know they have been heard
- Tell them they are not alone
- Let them know there are treatments available that can help
- Guide them to professional help.

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255) is a resource for family and friends and can be a place to discuss concerns and strategies for support until professional assistance is in place.

For suicide prevention information and more about mental health and wellness, visit www.SAMHSA.gov and www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov.

NATIONAL
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suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Free, expert advice on helping people at risk for suicide is available online and by telephone.