

**DeSoto County Schools**

**Risk Factors for Youth Suicide**

**A Guide for Educators and Parents**

Risk factors for suicide refer to personal or environmental characteristics that are associated with suicide. The environment includes the social and cultural environment as well as the physical environment. People affected by one or more of these risk factors may have a greater probability of suicidal behavior. Some risk factors cannot be changed-­­such as a previous suicide attempt-­­but they can be used to help identify someone who may be vulnerable to suicide.

There is no single list of risk factors. The list below summarizes the risk factors identified by the most recent research.

**Behavioral Health Issues/Disorders**:

* Depressive disorders
* Substance abuse or dependence (alcohol and other drugs)
* Conduct/disruptive behavior disorders
* Other disorders (e.g., anxiety disorders, personality disorders)
* Previous suicide attempts
* Self injury (without intent to die)
* Genetic/biological vulnerability

**Personal Characteristics**:

* Hopelessness
* Low self esteem
* Loneliness
* Social alienation and isolation, lack of belonging
* Low stress and frustration tolerance
* Impulsivity
* Risk taking, recklessness
* Poor problem solving or coping skills
* Perception of self as very underweight or very overweight
* Capacity to self injure
* Perception of being a burden (e.g., to family and friends)

 **Adverse/Stressful Life Circumstances**:

* Interpersonal difficulties or losses (e.g., breaking up with a girlfriend or boyfriend)
* Disciplinary or legal problems
* Bullying, either as victim or perpetrator
* School or work problems (e.g., actual or perceived difficulties in school or work, not  attending school or work, not going to college)
* Physical, sexual, and/or psychological abuse
* Chronic physical illness or disability
* Exposure to suicide of peer

**Risky Behaviors**:

* Alcohol or drug use
* Delinquency
* Aggressive/violent behavior
* Risky sexual behavior

**Family Characteristics**:

* Family history of suicide or suicidal behavior
* Parental mental health problems
* Parental divorce
* Death of parent or other relative
* Problems in parent child relationship

**Environmental Factors**:

* Negative social and emotional environment at school, including negative attitudes, beliefs, feelings, and interactions of staff and students
* Lack of acceptance of differences
* Expression and acts of hostility
* Lack of respect and fair treatment
* Lack of respect for the cultures of all students
* Limitations in school physical environment, including lack of safety and security
* Weapons on campus
* Poorly lit areas conducive to bullying and violence
* Limited access to mental health care
* Access to lethal means, particularly in the home
* Exposure to other suicides
* Exposure to stigma and discrimination against students based on sexual orientation gender identity, race and ethnicity, disability, or physical characteristics
* Victimization and bullying by others, lack of support from and rejection by family and peers

Seeking Assistance:

In seeking assistance, your child’s safety is the first consideration. The child should never be left alone during this crisis. If your child has a physician or therapist, call to alert them of the situation. Alternatively, the **National Suicide Prevention** **hotline** can be called at 888-359-8255, the **Memphis Crisis Center** at 901-274-7477, or in severe cases, call **911**.

Information obtained from Toolkit for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention-Compiled by: Shashank V. Joshi, MD, Mary Ojakian, RN, Linda Lenoir, RN, MSN, CNS, and Jasmine Lopez, MA, NCC