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## SUICIDE ON UNIVERSITY CAMPUSES

**The Good News:** College students do not commit suicide more often than their peers outside of college. In fact the rate of suicide of students is 50% of that for their age and gender<sup>1</sup>

### The Sobering News:

- Suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death among college students (accidents are #1)
- More teenagers and young adults die from suicide than from all medical illnesses combined.
- One in twelve U.S. college students makes a suicide plan
- Many mental illnesses often first appear in adolescence
- Most young adults who are diagnosed with depression do not receive appropriate treatment.
- The overall rate of completed suicides among university students is 7.5 per 100,000

Among the general older adolescent population suicide risk factors include impulsivity, high risk-taking behavior and substance. Conversely college student suicides are more often depressed, quiet, socially isolated and not substance abusers.

### Other risk factors correlated with college student suicides:

- International student - thought to be connected to feelings of isolation
- Psychosis
- Depression
- Taking more than four years to complete college
- Male gender (rate for completions by men is 10.0 compared to 4.5 for women)
- Students between the ages of 20 to 24
- Students with pre-existing mental health conditions
- Students who develop mental illnesses during college
- An attraction or lack of repulsion toward death and suicide

### Situational Issues

- Living away from home for the first time
- Academic pressures:
  - Overachievers unable to tolerate any hint of failure
  - Students driven to achieve beyond their abilities
  - Development of stress disorders in response to perceived or real stress
- Relational stress
- Inadequate coping skills

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<sup>1</sup> During the first two years of college the suicide rate for women is below the national average. During junior and senior years the rate is even with the national average. The suicide rate rises above the national average for women during graduate school years. (Silverman et al., 1997)

**How to help** the student you suspect make be thinking of suicide:

1. Show you care
  - a. Listen to understand situational factors that may seem overwhelming
  - b. Allow expressions of feelings
2. Ask about suicide
  - a. Do you have a plan?
  - b. Have you ever tried to kill yourself before?
  - c. How have you coped in the past with these kinds of thoughts and feelings?
3. Seek help from your supervisors
  - a. Do NOT promise confidentiality
  - b. Do NOT involve other residents if possible
4. Ensure immediate safety
5. Make referral to CAPS and to Crisis Line

## RESOURCES

**Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) - 296- 6090**

**Crisis Line 800 244-5767 or 206 461-3222 - 24-hour telephone crisis intervention**

Suicide: Read this First: [www.metanoia.org/suicide](http://www.metanoia.org/suicide) - an excellent resource for persons experiencing suicidal thoughts. It is a compelling, well-written site that offers a variety of options to imminent suicidal behavior as well as resources for further assistance. A student could spend considerable time at the site itself or follow links to other helpful sites.

American Association of Suicidology (AAS): [www.suicidology.org](http://www.suicidology.org) - an organization of persons focused on suicide including researchers, clinicians, preventionists, crisis workers and survivors of suicide. The site provides statistics, basic information on how to intervene with a suicidal person and numbers for local agencies.

## REFERENCES

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