

Who is at risk for suicide?

Suicide does not discriminate. People of all genders, ages, and ethnicities are at risk for suicide. But people most at risk tend to share certain characteristics. The main risk factors for suicide are:

- Depression, other mental disorders, or substance abuse disorder
- A prior suicide attempt
- Family history of a mental disorder or substance abuse
- Family history of suicide
- Family violence, including physical or sexual abuse
- Having guns or other firearms in the home
- Incarceration, being in prison or jail
- Being exposed to others' suicidal behavior, such as that of family members, peers, or media figures.

The risk for suicidal behavior also is associated with changes in brain chemicals called neurotransmitters, including serotonin, which is also associated with depression. Lower levels of serotonin have been found in the brains of people with a history of suicide attempts.

Many people have some of these risk factors but do not attempt suicide. Suicide is not a normal response to stress. It is however, a sign of extreme distress, not a harmless bid for attention.

The Facts

- Men are more likely to die by suicide than women, but women are more likely to attempt suicide. Men are more likely to use deadlier methods, such as firearms or suffocation. Women are more likely than men to attempt suicide by poisoning.
- Suicide remains one the third leading cause of death for young people ages 15 to 24 and the fourth leading cause of death for children 10-14.
- Older adults are at risk, too. White males age 85 and older consistently have the highest suicide rate than any other age and ethnic group.
- American Indians and Alaska Natives tend to have the highest rate of suicides, followed by non-Hispanic Whites. Hispanics tend to have the lowest rate of suicides, while African Americans tend to have the second lowest rate.
- Research has shown that mental and substance abuse disorders are risk factors for suicide

Help is available:

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) can help people learn new ways of dealing with stressful experiences by training them to consider alternative actions when thoughts of suicide arise.

Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) has been shown to reduce the rate of suicide among people with borderline personality disorder, a serious mental illness characterized by unstable moods, relationships, self-image, and behavior.

If you know someone who is considering suicide, do not leave him or her alone. Try to get your loved one to seek immediate help from his or her doctor or the nearest hospital emergency room, or call 911. Remove any access he or she may have to firearms or other potential tools for suicide, including medications.

What are some risk factors for nonfatal suicide attempts?

- An estimated 11 nonfatal suicide attempts occur per every suicide death. Men and the elderly are more likely to have fatal attempts than are women and youth.
- Risk factors for nonfatal suicide attempts by adults include depression and other mental disorders, alcohol and other substance abuse and separation or divorce.
- Risk factors for attempted suicide by youth include depression, alcohol or other drug-use disorder, physical or sexual abuse, and disruptive behavior.

Most suicide attempts are expressions of extreme distress, not harmless bids for attention. A person who appears suicidal should not be left alone and needs immediate mental health treatment.

<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/suicide-in-the-us-statistics-and-prevention/index.shtml>