



INDIAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS

Presidential Action Plan 2018-19



Mission Kishore Uday

Precious Teens Precious Lives

Prevention of Adolescent Suicide

Vital Role of Parents, Teachers, Caretakers

Globally, suicide by adolescents is on the rise. In India, suicide is the leading cause of death in adolescents. For every unfortunate suicide there are twenty five failed attempts and countless suicidal thoughts. Fortunately four out of five teenagers give clear warning signs which can be detected by parents, teachers and caretakers. Timely counseling and referral can save young lives.

Warning signs of Suicide

Verbalizing	Death wish revealed through talking, writing or texting on social media. Wishing, "I should have never been born. I wish this was the end."
Acquiring means	Collecting weapons, pills, ropes, maps, train time tables. Searching the internet for ways to do self harm or suicide helplines.
Feeling of hopelessness	Sense of being trapped, sadness, thinking, "nothing better will happen". Ending any discussion on " There is no hope and life has no meaning."
Self hatred	Guilt , Shame, serious dislike for self, disturbed sleep and appetite. Mentioning, "I am a burden to my family or world."
Geeting things in order	Giving away possessions and valuables to friends or siblings. Closing bank account and doing charity.
“Good bye”	Making unexpected visits to friends and relatives. Saying bye-bye as if this is the last one.
Social withdrawal	Isolation from friends and family, deterioration of social relationships. Excessive anger and aggression. Fall in academic performance
High risk behaviors	Reckless driving, drug abuse. Increased consumption of alcohol and tobacco.

Parents and teachers being the foremost caretakers are likely to identify the above warning signs much earlier than others. They should remain calm, be empathetic, ensure safety of teen and help the disturbed adolescent. Professional help from a pediatrician, counselor or psychiatrist may be necessary. Delay or reluctance will worsen the situation. Any change in behavior and loss of interest in activities enjoyed previously for more than two weeks maybe a pointer towards mental disorder.

Many parents wrongly believe that a mention about death wish by a teenager is an attention seeking behavior. Caretakers should take every word **very** seriously. Talking to distressed teens about suicidal intentions makes them feel that parents are caring, nonjudgmental and empathetic. They also feel understood and supported. Parents should help the teen to cope up with the stressful situation. Talking to teens about suicidal thoughts does not predispose them to self harm.

Individual Factors	Family and School Factors	Societal Factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Poor self esteem ❖ Previous suicide attempt ❖ Alcohol and drug abuse ❖ Failed romantic relationship ❖ Mental health disorder ❖ Chronic disease ❖ Recent loss of near and dear one ❖ Sexual identity confusion and shame ❖ Easy access to lethal weapons / pills ❖ Hesitancy for obtaining help. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Family history of suicide ❖ Disrupted family milieu ❖ Financial crisis ❖ Alcoholism in parents ❖ Domestic violence ❖ Sexual abuse ❖ Bullying / ragging ❖ Humiliation by teachers ❖ Corporal punishment and poor discipline methods Truancy ❖ Poor academic performance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Lack of awareness ❖ Less number of mental health professionals ❖ Inaccessible and unaffordable services ❖ Social stigma associated with mental health disorders ❖ Cyber harassment ❖ Poor support from health care workers ❖ Unfriendly teenage care services

Caretakers must take note of “protective factors” which prevent teenagers from ending lives and help them cope with stressors. This learning should begin early in life and the active process of life skills education must continue through teenage and youth.

Protective factors	Mechanism
Life skills and resilience	Ability to effectively handle difficult situations.
Family and school connectedness	Mental comfort and early detection of problems.
Restriction to lethal means	Opportunity is avoided during mental crisis.
Cultural and religious beliefs	All cultures and religions discourage suicidal acts.
Strong support system	Enables easy access to a disturbed teenager.
Peer support and trained peer educators	Teenagers tend to disclose their issues with friends.

Life is full of everyday challenges and teenagers are vulnerable to the various stressors like academic pressure, competitive sports, peer influence, social media hazards, substance abuse, separation from parents, bullying, disturbed relationships, body image dissatisfaction, sexual identity confusion and uncertainty about the future. Life skills act as vaccines against external influences and internal emotional turmoil. Life skills education by parents and teachers nurtures a mentally strong, resilient and responsible teen who can handle stress and challenges effectively.

Following **life skills** should be taught to children from a young age:

1. **Self awareness:** Knowing ones likes, dislikes, strengths and weaknesses.
2. **Decision making:** Objectively understanding the problem and the central issue, weighing pros and cons of each possible solution, choosing the best option with highest gains and lowest pains and giving it a fair trial before accepting or rejecting it.
3. **Critical thinking:** Analyzing a problem in an objective and unbiased way. Probing into understand things in detail with an open mind and without any prejudice.
4. **Coping with stress:** Identifying the stressors and using relaxation techniques. Trying to change the things which one can with unconditional acceptance of the things that cannot be changed. Adopting a healthy lifestyle, coping and problem solving skills.
5. **Handling emotions:** Dealing with unpleasant emotions like rage, grief, anxiety, guilt, shame, jealousy and envy. Beliefs decide the way one feels and reacts to any adversity. Teenagers need to convert unhealthy emotions into healthy emotions by practice, patience and persistence. They must learn to control and express emotions in a 'safe' way without harming themselves or others.
6. **Effective communication:** Ability to successfully convey thoughts and feelings to others. Nonverbal tools like eye contact, touch, nodding and smiling must be used appropriately. Learning to use oral and written words without hurting others is also necessary.
7. **Nurturing relationships:** Ability to accept differences, encourage mutual growth and provide support and to avoid gossip, negative comments and constant ridicule.
8. **Personal safety:** To live a risk free and healthy life by adopting healthy eating habits, ensuring adequate sleep, good time management, cyber-protection, safe sexual behaviour, regular physical exercise without indulging in drugs and alcohol and following traffic rules.
9. **Goal setting:** Decide what one wishes to achieve in life. Detailed analysis and planning, proper training, persistent efforts, readiness to activate next plan in case of failure and not putting blame on self or others are needed to achieve success in life.
10. **Wise use of resources:** Managing pocket money wisely. Knowing the expected monthly and daily expenses, keeping accounts, avoiding lavish shopping and borrowing money.

Teaching **resilience** to children and teenagers is the most vital parental task. Resilient teens are flexible, adjust well to various life situations and excel in academics, career and inter personal relationships. Parents and teachers can inculcate resilience in a teenager by role modeling desired behavior, setting limits for acceptable behavior, saying “No” assertively with proper explanation, appreciating desirable behaviors, encouraging skills, giving responsibilities and teaching that failures do happen and a single setback is not the end of the world. Constant criticism, nagging, too much preaching, humiliation and empty praise must be avoided. Parents should follow authoritative parenting style that shields against all high risk behavior including self harm.

Caretakers should provide a supportive environment to adolescents and be easily approachable, especially in a stressful situation. This is possible only if caretakers show empathy and have effective communication skills. Else, the teenager may use unhealthy methods for managing stress like alcohol, smoking, media or drug abuse, avoiding situations or people, remaining detached, running away from home, sexual promiscuity, aggression, violence and self harm.

Digital Parenting Skills

Cyber bullying, fear of missing out (F.O.M.O.) from the group activities, gossiping online and harassment by known or unknown persons is rampant in today's cyber world. Teenagers staying away from homes either for education or career are particularly exposed to this unrevealed stress. Parents can protect vulnerable teens by teaching these simple rules.

Never disclose your personal information or revealing pictures on internet.

Avoid chatting with strangers or “friends of friends”.

Never click the “save password” icon.

Contact local cyber crime branch or webmaster if harassed.

Use media judiciously and wisely. Formulate a media use plan and stick to it

Parents should teach cyber ethics to your teenager. They should follow the WWW approach. Ask the teenager about “Who” they talk to when online, “Where” they go online and “What” they do online. They should keep updated with time and technology.

Parents and teachers have an immense responsibility to detect a problem EARLY, pay serious attention to it and take professional help if it can't be tackled at home or school. Delay in obtaining help can aggravate the problem to the point of being unmanageable even by professionals. Earlier the issue is addressed, the better. Teenagers are dependent on parents and teachers for many needs. Parents should keep the communication channels open, encourage positive change, delete “wishful thinking”, learning about warning signs and seek professional help if needed. Teenagers are priceless and so is life.

Emotional Support Help-lines

Caretakers and teenagers can download a free app for suicide prevention from <https://mhtech.in> Following table gives contact details for obtaining emotional support during stressful situations. (Courtesy: Sohini Dey)

Name of the city	Name of the organization	Contact details
Delhi	Sumaitri	feelingsuicidal@sumaitri.net , 011-23389090
Kolkata	Life line foundation	reach@lifelinekolkata.org,033-24637401/7432
Srinagar	Kashmir lifeline	18001807020
Hyderabad	Roshni	roshnihelp@gmail.com, +914066202000/2001
Kochi	Maithri	maithrihelp@gmail.com, 0484 2540530
Chennai	Sneha	help@snehaindia.com, +914424640050/60
Mumbai	iCall (T.I.S.S.)	icall@tiss.edu ,+9122 25521111
Mumbai	Aasra	www.aasra.info , 022-27546669
Mumbai	Samaritans	smaritans.helpline@gmail.com, 02264643267
Jamshedpur	Jeevan	jeevanjamshedpur@gmail.com , 06576555555
Bengaluru	Sahai	+918025497777
Goa	COOJ	08322252525
Ahmedabad	Saath	saath12@yahoo.com , +91 79 26305544/0222
Kota	Hope	07244333666

1098 (toll free) is an all India helpline available for 24 hours.