Suicide is one of the leading causes of death among 15-19 year-olds. Half of all mental health conditions in adulthood start by 14 years of age. For many young people, the teenage years are a time of exploring new opportunities and freedoms, but they can also be a time of anxiety about academic performance, relationships and the future.

Occasional emotional distress is normal in adolescence, but for some young people, if the distress becomes long-lasting or overwhelming, it can lead to difficulty in everyday functioning and, in the most tragic cases, suicide.
Here is some advice for helping young people

**Signs to look out for among students**

- Expressing thoughts, feelings or plans about ending their life, including through stories or pictures;
- A sudden or dramatic change in academic performance;
- Changes in mood, for example regularly becoming tearful, crying, or displaying severe emotional distress;
- Expressing hopelessness about the future;
- Changes in behaviour such as a withdrawal from others, loss of interest in activities they usually enjoy, or an increase in anger, hostility, agitation, irritability or impulsivity;
- Disruptive behavior, including conflict with other students or school staff;
- An increase in absences from school or difficulty in concentrating during lessons;
- Use of alcohol or drugs; and/or
- Bullying or breakdown of relationships with peers.

Pay particular attention to changes in mood and behaviour at times of stress, for example in the lead-up to exams or before or during other major changes in a student’s life.

**What you can do if you are worried**

- Talk to the student in a private space, conveying your concerns, and actively listen to what they say without judgment.
- Encourage the student to speak to someone they trust, such as a parent or other trusted family member, adult or health worker at the school. Offer to speak with the person identified but do not do so unless the student agrees.
- If the student has attempted to, or indicates that they are about to, intentionally harm themselves, seek immediate support from health services, either within the school system (such as a school counsellor or nurse) or in the community. Do not leave the student alone.

**What you can do as head of a school**

- Organize information sessions and mental health promotion activities for students to support their mental health and well-being, and provide training sessions to enhance students’ cognitive, emotional and social skills to help them cope with stressful situations.
- Organize training for staff on recognizing and managing mental distress and looking out for signs that a student may be at risk of suicide.
- Create a culture at school that promotes the sharing of difficulties related to mental health.
- Organize and encourage activities that promote the good mental health of staff members.
- Design and implement a plan for how to sensitively manage and communicate the suicide or suicide attempt of a student or a member of staff to the school community in a way that minimizes further distress. Measures should include the availability of trained health workers and support services for students, parents, and staff.

More information

**Preventing suicide: a resource for teachers and other school staff**

https://www.who.int/publications-detail/preventing-suicide-a-resource-series