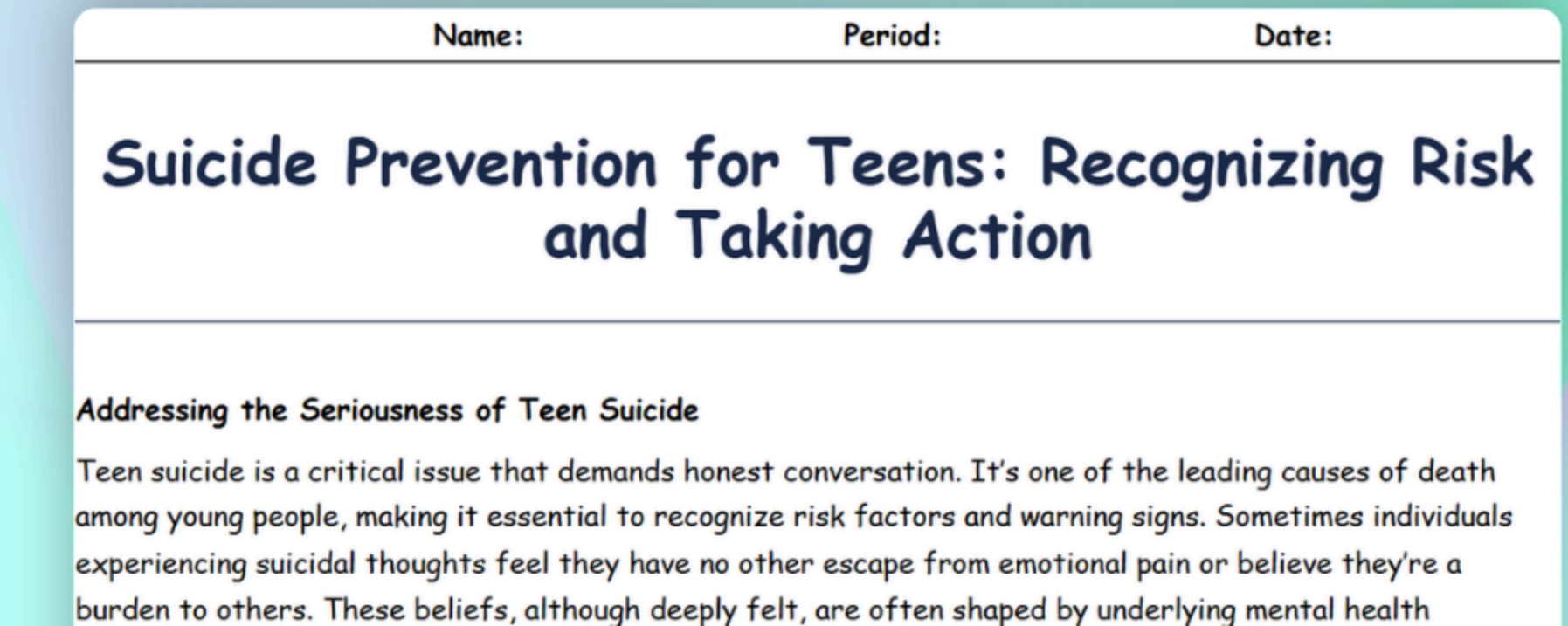
NO PREP

Suicide Prevention for Teens

Recognizing Risk and Taking Action

Includes: Student reading, case study, differentiated questions, teacher key



Name: Period: Date:

Suicide Prevention for Teens: Recognizing Risk and Taking Action

Addressing the Seriousness of Teen Suicide

Teen suicide is a critical issue that demands honest conversation. It's one of the leading causes of death among young people, making it essential to recognize risk factors and warning signs. Sometimes individuals experiencing suicidal thoughts feel they have no other escape from emotional pain or believe they're a burden to others. These beliefs, although deeply felt, are often shaped by underlying mental health

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Teen suicide is a critical issue that demands honest conversation. It's one of the leading causes of death among young people, making it essential to recognize risk factors and warning signs. Sometimes individuals experiencing suicidal thoughts feel they have no other escape from emotional pain or believe they're a burden to others. These beliefs, although deeply felt, are often shaped by underlying mental health conditions and distorted thinking. Bringing up suicide with a friend or classmate doesn't "plant" the idea in their head. On the contrary, it can offer them an opening to discuss what they've been feeling. Understanding that suicide can affect anyone, regardless of background, helps reduce the stigma. If you or someone you know expresses thoughts of hopelessness or wanting to die, it's crucial to take it seriously and seek professional help immediately.

Recognizing Warning Signs in Yourself or Peers

Warning signs aren't always obvious, but certain behaviors can signal increased risk. These may include talking or joking about death, expressing feelings of being trapped, isolating from friends, giving away prized possessions, or exhibiting extreme mood swings. Even seemingly casual comments like, "Everyone would be better off without me," can be red flags. Physical changes, like a sudden drop in hygiene or a drastic change in eating or sleeping habits, can also be indicators. For some teens, these signs come on gradually, while for others they appear suddenly. If you notice a friend acting out of character (extremely withdrawn or repeatedly mentioning suicidal thoughts), do not dismiss it. Trust your instincts if something seems wrong. It's far better to ask direct questions and be wrong than to stay silent and risk missing a chance to help.

How to Respond and Get Help

If you suspect someone is contemplating suicide, the first step is to take them seriously. Ask direct questions like, "Are you thinking about killing yourself?" While it may feel uncomfortable, direct communication often provides relief to the person in crisis, knowing someone cares enough to ask. Encourage them to talk to a mental health professional immediately or contact a suicide prevention hotline. If you ever feel someone is in immediate danger, don't hesitate to call emergency services. Your role might also include reaching out to a trusted adult, such as a teacher, parent, or counselor, if your friend refuses to seek help on their own. Remember that you're not betraying confidence by seeking professional assistance: you could be saving a life. You don't have to handle the situation alone, and it's not your job to be a therapist, but offering empathy and connection can make a critical difference.

The Power of Listening, Empathy, and Speaking Up

Sometimes what a distressed teen needs most is a listener—someone who won't judge or trivialize their feelings. Allow them to share their pain without rushing to offer solutions. Empathy involves acknowledging their emotions and conveying that you genuinely care. Simple statements like, "That sounds really hard," or "I'm here for you," can be remarkably powerful. Speaking up also means dispelling shame. Suicidal thoughts often come with guilt or fear of judgment. By responding compassionately and guiding them to professional help, you show that these thoughts, while serious, do not define someone's entire identity. Mental health struggles are treatable, and many people go on to live fulfilling lives after seeking and receiving help.

Key Information: Teen Suicide Prevention Overview

Risk Factors	Warning Signs	Action Steps
Mental illnesses (depression, anxiety)	Talking about death or hopelessness	Ask directly about suicidal thoughts
Bullying, traumatic experiences	Withdrawing from friends or activities	Encourage contacting a trusted adult/professional
Easy access to lethal means	Sudden mood changes, giving away belongings	Call 911 or emergency services if immediate risk

Risk Factors	Warning Signs	Action Steps
Lack of support system	Any mention of feeling worthless or a burden	Provide empathy, reduce stigma

Case Study Excerpt

Amara had been struggling silently with depression. Her parents were often busy with work, and she felt invisible at school. After a series of bad days, she began texting her close friend statements like, "I can't do this anymore" and "What's the point?" Concerned, her friend asked if she was thinking about hurting herself. Amara hesitated but finally admitted she'd been having suicidal thoughts. The friend immediately urged Amara to seek help from the school counselor. Despite Amara's fear of being judged, she went. The counselor calmly listened, connected her with professional resources, and looped in a trusted teacher to make sure Amara had daily check-ins. Amara later said that honest, direct questioning saved her life by showing her someone actually cared enough to intervene.

1. Which direct question did Amara's friend ask to clarify her risk of self-harm?

_____

_____

2. What was the key action that helped Amara receive the professional support she needed?

_____

_____

Multiple Choice

1. Talking to someone about suicide will most likely:

    a) Make them far more likely to act on those thoughts instead of seeking help

    b) Show that you care and might offer them a chance to share their feelings

    c) Plant the idea in their head

    d) Have no impact on their thoughts

2. Which of the following is a warning sign that someone might be considering suicide?

    a) Improving grades and showing stable moods

    b) Discussing how they're learning a new skill they are excited to master

    c) Expressing future plans and optimism

    d) Withdrawing from friends and making statements about feeling useless

3. If you believe a friend is in immediate danger of harming themselves, you should:

    a) Tell them they're overreacting

    b) Keep their secret and do nothing

    c) Notify a trusted adult or call emergency services right away

    d) Wait a few days to see if the situation improves without your help

Matching

Write the letter of the correct definition on the line next to each term.

Term	Definition
1. ___ Risk Factor	A) Example includes expressions of hopelessness or giving away valuables
2. ___ Warning Sign	B) A mental health professional who diagnoses and treats emotional issues
3. ___ Hotline	C) Compassionate understanding of another person's feelings
4. ___ Empathy	D) Condition or circumstance increasing the chance of suicidal thoughts
5. ___ Counselor	E) A direct phone service offering immediate help and support

Fill-in-the-Blank

1. Access to _____ means, such as firearms or large quantities of medication, can increase the risk of suicide.

2. _____ often involves understanding another person's emotions without judgment or dismissal.

3. If someone seems suicidal, contacting a trained adult or a _____ can be a life-saving step.

Short Answer

Answer each question in 2-4 complete sentences.

1. Why is it important to ask someone directly if they are considering suicide?

_____

_____

_____

2. How might a supportive school environment help prevent teen suicide?

3. What could you do if you feel a friend is suicidal but they beg you not to tell anyone?