

SAVING FROM SUICIDE

Australians aged 15 to 24 have one of the highest suicide rates in the world. In this age group, the leading cause of death is traffic accidents. Incredibly, the second highest cause of death is suicide!

Brent Williams, co-founder of the Tomorrow's Youth program Empower U, is respected as one of the leading practitioners within the child/teenage education and development fraternity. He estimates that for each completed suicide of a young male, there are at least another 15 suicide attempts, and that for every completed female suicide, there are at least another 100 suicide attempts. As such, according to Williams, "There will be over 40,000 youth suicide attempts in Australia this year. This is a result of an interaction between background, personal and family factors, current emotional state and a recent significant life event which leads to an intolerable mental anguish in the young person."

Signs of an impending suicide attempt include depression, conduct disorder, a disruptive family background, relationship conflicts, poor coping skills,

psychiatric illness, chronic unemployment and the anniversary of past losses or major life events. Williams also warns parents of another high-risk group that is often forgotten - perfectionists and over-achievers who place unrealistic expectations on themselves.

"Parents must learn how to form better relationships with their children and provide a stable and safe physical and emotional home environment," says Williams. "Similarly, they must learn to listen to teenagers, not only to what is being said, but also to the covert messages. Parents must learn to be supportive and not intrusive, and encourage appropriate expression of emotions to help avert this terrible tragedy. Parents must have the ability to intervene in stressful situations, take suicidal threats seriously and be proactive in the early detection and management of psychiatric illness. When in doubt, they must seek advice from a professional."

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