

TEEN SUICIDE PREVENTION WEEK

Addressing an epidemic among
our youth

ThePsySSA Trauma and Violence
Division



THE TEEN SUICIDE CRISIS IN SOUTH AFRICA

- In South Africa, **9% of all teenage deaths** have been attributed to suicide ([Western Cape Government, 2022](#))
- **20%** of high school learners in South Africa have **attempted suicide** ([South African Society of Psychiatrists, 2020](#))
- Mental health professionals anticipate an increase in suicidality

WHAT IS SUICIDALITY

Various terms are used when speaking about suicidality, some of these include:

- **Non-suicidal self-injury:** Self-harming behaviour characterised by the deliberate destruction of the body with no intent to die ([Schreiber & Culpepper, 2023](#))
- **Suicidal ideation:** Thoughts about killing oneself; these thoughts may consist of a plan
- **Suicide attempt:** Self-harming behaviour with the intent of killing oneself, but is non-fatal
- **(Completed) Suicide:** Self-harming behaviour that is intended to kill oneself and is fatal



WHAT LEADS TO SUICIDALITY & SUICIDE?

- There is a link between existing mental disorders (such as depression) and suicide ([WHO, 2021](#))
- However, many suicides happen impulsively as a result of being unable to cope with a life stressor (e.g. loss of social support, conflict, violence etc.)
- Teens represent a group specifically vulnerable to suicide

WHAT MAKES OUR TEENS VULNERABLE TO SUICIDE?

- Adolescence is a period of significant change physically, emotionally and socially.
- Young individuals are tasked with making important decisions regarding their future academic or career paths peer groups and romantic relationships.
- Importantly, they must form their own identity, and be individuated from the family environment.
- Within the high school environment, there is increasing pressure from peers, family and teachers which may provoke a sense of helplessness
- Within SA, teens are also exposed to various economic, and social issues

([Bilsen, 2018](#))

RISK FACTORS

- [Other factors](#) which place teens at risk for suicide include:
- Existing mental diagnoses (Affective disorders, alcohol use disorders, personality disorders, eating disorders, & schizophrenia)
- Previous suicide attempts (particularly among girls)
- Impulsivity
- Poorer problem-solving skills
- Poor mood regulation
- Perfectionist personalities
- Family history of suicide
- School problems and academic stress
- Acute conflicts with parental figures
- Bullying & cyberbullying



HOW TO IDENTIFY SIGNS OF SUICIDE

- Talking about wanting to die
- Feeling like being a burden
- Feelings of hopelessness, extreme anxiety or rage
- Making a plan or researching ways to die
- Withdrawing from friends
- Loss of interest in activities previously enjoyed
- Behavioural changes
- Impulsive behaviour



HOW TO HELP YOUR TEEN

- Start normalising conversations about mental health in an empathic way
- Listen to what is being said in a non-judgmental way
- Remember suicidal ideation is not attention-seeking - acknowledge the seriousness of the matter
- Do not promise to keep it a secret
- If you are unable to speak to your child attempt to get them mental health support from a counsellor or psychologist
- Low cost or free resources can be accessed at your local clinic or district hospital
- You could seek support from mental health NGOs



RESOURCES AVAILABLE

South African Depression & Anxiety Group

Suicide crisis helpline - 0800 567 567

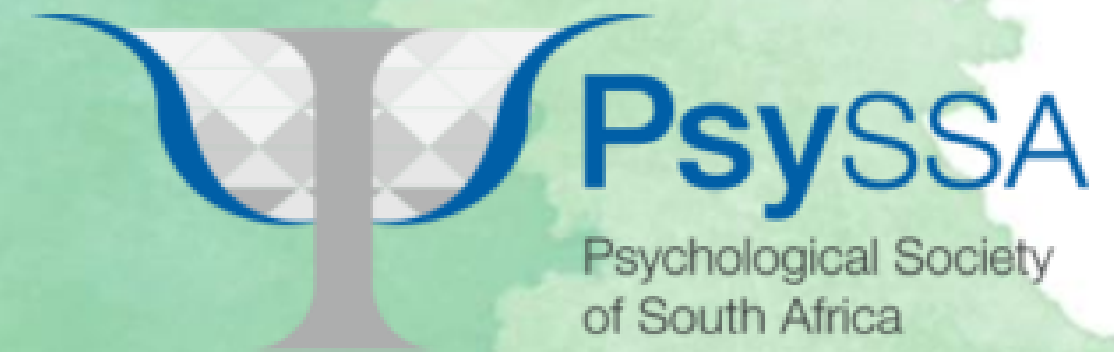
CIPLA Mental Health Helpline - 0800 456 789

iLifeline South Africa - 0861 322 322

FAMSA - 031 202 8987

Childline South Africa - 08000 55 555

Johannesburg Child Welfare Society - 011 298 8500



TEEN SUICIDE AWARENESS WEEK

There is always hope

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