

# Suicide Awareness & Prevention Activity Supplement

by Gina Halpin

Following on from the WHO International Suicide Prevention Day 2010, which took place in September, this activity supplement focuses on suicide prevention and awareness and contains activities and information youth workers can use with their youth group to raise awareness of suicide among young people, including what signs to look out for, a listing of support agencies and facts about suicide.

## Background

In Ireland around 457 people die by suicide each year, of this nearly 20% are aged between 15 and 24. If someone is seriously depressed and thinking of attempting suicide there are often warning signs that friends can pick up on. Noticing and acting upon these warning signs could save a life. Most people who are considering suicide are willing to talk about their problems if someone shows they care. It is important not to be afraid of discussing the subject with someone you think may be suicidal. Talking about suicide won't 'plant the idea' in someone's head. This is a myth. If you are wrong, you're at least showing a friend you care. If you are right, you could save their life.

### Some warnings signs include:

- Withdrawing from family and friends.
- Having difficulty concentrating and thinking clearly.
- Sleeping too much or too little.
- Feeling tired most of the time.
- Gaining or losing a significant amount of weight.
- Talking about feeling hopeless or guilty.
- Talking about suicide or death.
- Self-destructive behaviour like drinking too much or abusing drugs.
- Losing interest in favourite things or activities.
- Giving away prized possessions.
- Mood swings.



## Myths about Suicide

**Myth:** Suicide happens with no warning.

**Fact:** Eight out of ten people who kill themselves give some sort of warning or clue to others, even if it is something subtle.

**Myth:** There's always a note left behind when someone commits suicide.

**Fact:** In most cases, there is no suicide note.

**Myth:** Someone who talks a lot about suicide is just trying to get attention.

**Fact:** It's just the opposite. More than 70% of people who kill themselves have previously threatened to do so when someone says they feel this way, take it seriously.

**Myth:** People who are suicidal are intent on dying and feel there is no turning back.

**Fact:** Most people who are suicidal are actually of two minds about it. Part of them wants to die and part of them doesn't. The main thing they want is to stop their pain.

**Myth:** People who attempt suicide once are unlikely to try it again.

**Fact:** 80% of people who die from suicide have made at least one other attempt already.

**Myth:** If you mention suicide to someone who seems depressed, you're just planting the idea in his or her mind

**Fact:** Discussing it openly can help, not hurt.

Source: <http://familyeducation.com/depression/teen/>

## Activity One Isolation Island

Isolation whether real or perceived is something we all have to face at some point in our lives. The sense of being alone and uncared for is a reason often given by young people to explain a suicide attempt. This activity gets young people to tease out why they might feel isolated and how they can cope better with it, when it occurs.

**Materials:** Small pieces of paper, flip chart paper, pens and markers.

Give each person a small piece of paper and ask them to complete the sentence **“I might feel isolated if.....”**

Once they have completed the sentence place the papers into a container.

Go around the group and ask each person to take out one piece of paper and read out the sentence. Then pin it on the flip chart paper (already pinned up on a wall in the room).

At the end of the exercise ask if anyone has any other reasons for isolation and add them in.

### **Possible reasons for isolation can include:**

Parental separation

Being bullied

Peer pressure to do something you do not want to do

Not having a friend to talk to

Being unable to say how you feel

Being different i.e. race, culture, sexuality, appearance, intelligence etc..

Source: Youth Pack, The Samaritans

**Suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem**

## Activity Two Depression and Young People

Everyone feels low at certain times in their lives and this is usually related to a loss such as bereavement, the breakup of a relationship or a stressful event. Normally young people will work through their feelings and come to terms with events over time, but for some young people the cause of their depression may not be obvious or their level of depression may seem out of proportion to the event that appears to have triggered it.

**Materials:** Flip chart paper with the following statement written on it.

*“ many adults do not understand or believe that young people can suffer from depression. Friends sometimes avoid a young person who is depressed because they are sad and miserable and no longer fun to be with. Even the most concerned and loving family may not understand that the young person has got an illness.”*

Read the extract to the group and ask for their reactions:

### **Possible discussion questions:**

**How** much do you agree or disagree with this statement?

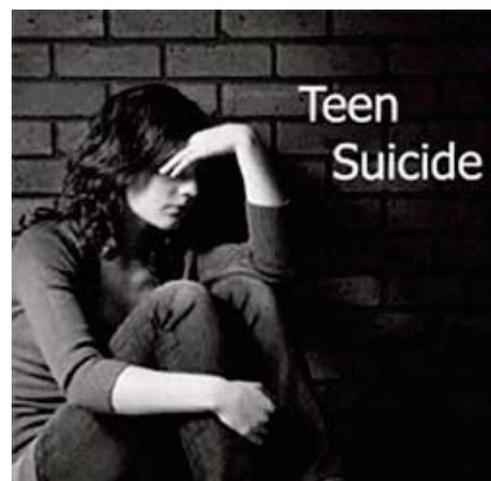
**Have** you ever met someone who might have been depressed?

**How** did you feel talking to them?

**What** do you think the factors are that contribute to young people feeling depressed?

**What** would you suggest a young person should do if they are feeling depressed?

Source: Youth Pack, The Samaritans



## Activity Three Worry Map

Young Men are more likely to commit suicide while girls are more likely to self-harm. This activity encourages discussion around issues of potential worry and anxiety to young men and will give them the opportunity to voice these worries in a safe environment.

**Materials:** Sheets of flip chart paper – sellotaped together.

- Lay the sheet on the floor and ask one of the young people to lie flat on the paper and be drawn around by another.
- Once they have finished ask the “template” to stand up. You should now have a life size human silhouette to work with.
- Ask the group to take a pen and in turn think of a concern or pressure that young men experience, then write it down with an arrow to where it corresponds on the mapped silhouetted body.
- Stress that it does not have to be an issue personal to them, but could be a general worry that all young men share e.g. problems with parents, girl trouble, exam stress, bullying etc..
- Encourage the group to consider all aspects of life including home, school and their social life.
- After they have completed this, agree three or four main topics that are seen as a major worry and facilitate a discussion.

### Discussion suggestions

Is it a problem for all young men?

Is it different for young women?

Do they think the problems will resolve themselves, as they grow older?

Are there choices or solutions that other members of the group can suggest?

Who else could they talk to if this became a serious problem?

Close the session by identifying support networks / agencies they could contact (see resource listing at the end of this supplement).

Source: *Working with Young Men*, by Vanessa Rogers

## Activity Four Self-Harm Continuum

Self-harm in young people is often seen as a cry for help or a suicide attempt. Self-harm from the individual's point of view can be a coping strategy and their way of staying alive, the young person may not want to die. Self-harm is also more prevalent in young women.

In your group go through the following list of behaviours and ask each person to say how serious they consider each behaviour to be; from **Extremely Serious** to **Not Serious At All** in terms of self-harm.

Cutting your arms  
Pulling out your hair  
Over eating  
Binge drinking  
Smoking  
Taking drugs  
Burning yourself  
Driving too fast

Once they have expressed their opinions about the seriousness discuss the following points:

What makes the behaviour harmful?

Are some behaviours more harmful than others?

Have you ever taken part in any of these activities?

What kind of young people self-harm?

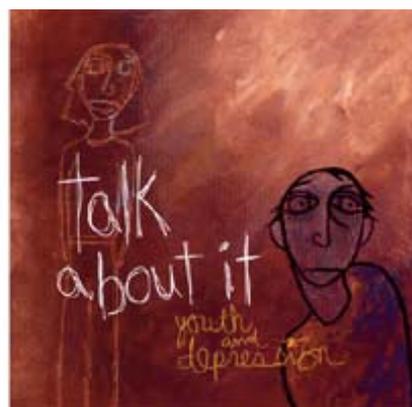
What factors might lead a young person to self-harm?

How can you be sure a friend is self-harming?

How easy is it to keep self-harm a secret?

Would you talk to a friend you thought was self-harming?

Source: *Youth Pack*, The Samaritans



## Activity Five

### Quiz – True or False

This activity can be done with your youth group and aims at facilitating a conversation about suicide in a safe environment.

**Q.1** It's very difficult to predict who will kill themselves since most young people who commit suicide do not communicate their intentions.

**False.** The notion that young people who talk about their suicide do not kill themselves is a myth. An overwhelming 80% of young people who commit suicide communicate their intentions before taking their lives. Most suicidal warnings are verbal or behavioural, while only 15% involve leaving notes.

**Q.2** It may be helpful to ask a young person who appears overly depressed, withdrawn, or grief-stricken whether they have ever considered suicide as a solution to their problems.

**True.** For a young person in these exaggerated, emotionally distressed states, bringing up suicide does not encourage them to kill themselves. On the contrary, raising the question of suicide encourages a young person to talk about suicide and shows that you recognize the depth of their pain.

**Q.3** If your friend's deep depression and suicidal talk stops and they suddenly appears very happy and relieved, you'll know the crisis has passed.

**False.** You should be suspicious of this sudden cheerful demeanour. It does not mean they are out of danger, in fact, their dramatic mood swing and sense of calm may be a result of them having decided to commit suicide.

**Q.4** Most young people who commit suicide have made a decision that death is their best option.

**False.** Most young people who kill themselves are in a state of pronounced conflict and confusion over whether to commit suicide. They are all sure, however, that they desperately want an end to their emotional suffering. There are many more suicidal attempts than there are successful suicides.

**Q.5** Extraordinary aggressiveness and hostility, hyperactivity, sexual promiscuity, and extreme risk-taking are often signs of impending suicidal attempts.

**True.** Even though these behaviours are very dissimilar to stereotypical pre-suicide behaviours like isolation, despair, depression, and apathy, they are serious red flags that are also associated with a young person's suicidal thinking and behaviour.

Source: [www.console.ie](http://www.console.ie)



#### Useful Websites

[www.console.ie](http://www.console.ie)

[www.3ts.ie](http://www.3ts.ie)

[www.aware.ie](http://www.aware.ie)

[www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)

[www.nsbsn.org](http://www.nsbsn.org) National suicide bereavement support network

[www.ias.ie](http://www.ias.ie) Irish Association of Suicidology

[www.spunout.ie](http://www.spunout.ie)

[www.irishhealth.com](http://www.irishhealth.com)

[www.reachout.com](http://www.reachout.com)

[www.nosp.ie](http://www.nosp.ie) National Office for Suicide Prevention