Mental Health Team at a community health centre. Some teams have bi-lingual youth workers. Parents or young people can call 24-hour telephone counselling services such as Lifeline 131 114 or the Salvo Suicide Prevention and Crisis Centre on (02) 9331 2000. If you have difficulty speaking English, call the Telephone Interpreter Service on 131 450 to help you call the service you need. The Transcultural Mental Health Centre, (02) 9840 3800 or 1800 648 911, can put you in touch with health professionals who speak your language. The Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors (STARTTS), (02) 9794 1900, provides counselling for emotional and psychological problems for people who have experienced trauma before coming to Australia. Interpreters can be arranged if necessary.

Some families and communities may find it hard to talk about issues like suicide, or about any difficulties they may have experienced in the past. But keeping these feelings inside can make things worse. Talking to someone who is specially trained to help with these issues, however, can be the first step to resolving problems and dealing with the pain.

Telephone numbers are correct at time of publication but are not continually updated. You may need to check the numbers in the telephone directory.

NSW Multicultural Health Communication Service
Website: http://www.mhcs.health.nsw.gov.au
Email: mhcs@sesiahs.health.nsw.gov.au
Tel: (02) 9816 0347

multicultural health communication

English
[BHC-3695]

Preventing Youth Suicide

NSW GOVERNMENT | Health

Suicide among 15 to 24 year-old people is a serious problem in Australia where more than 400 young people kill each themselves every year. There are now more deaths from suicide among young men aged 19 to 24 than there are from road deaths.

Adolescence can be a time of confusion and stress. Although most young people survive these years without major problems, others feel so helpless and without hope that they kill themselves. The reasons young people commit suicide vary, but common risk factors are:

- Having already made one suicide attempt, or more.
- If they are very depressed. Mood swings are normal for teenagers, but signs that someone is very depressed could include being depressed for a long time; losing interest in daily activities, withdrawing from friends, loss of energy and motivation; not enjoying things any more; feeling bad about themselves; sudden weight changes and changes in sleeping patterns..
- If their behaviour is extremely angry, destructive and impulsive and they abuse alcohol or drugs.
- If there are serious family problems, eg a violent, abusive family, an unsupportive family, or a family that is over-protective and restrictive.
- Relationship conflicts with friends or family. These are normal in adolescence, but can be serious when they persist.
- Other risk factors include mental illness such as severe depression, schizophrenia, chronic unemployment, bereavement, sexual abuse, failure at school, or concerns about sexuality. Young people who think they may be homosexual, for instance, may feel very alone because they're afraid to talk to anyone about this issue. Or they may be bullied or teased because of their sexuality.
- Young people who have experienced war, persecution, or trauma before coming to Australia may experience depression and feelings of hopelessness.

Factors that make young people less likely to commit suicide include: having a supportive person in their life - a parent, teacher, close friend or youth worker, for example; being able to cope with problems - a young person who's resourceful and able to cope with stressful situations will cope better with life's difficulties; having a supportive, caring family. Families which offer good communication, stability and guidance are important for young people..

How can parents help prevent youth suicide?

- Build a good relationship with teenagers. Ways to do this include spending time with them doing things you all enjoy; being supportive without intruding on their privacy. Be sympathetic if they're upset, for example, but accept that they may not want to tell you all the details of their problems.
- Listen to what teenagers have to say - young people often complain that parents are quick to give advice, but don't listen to their point of view.
- Be supportive in stressful situations like family break-ups, problems with friends, trouble with the police, important exams, problems or disappointments at school or with employment. (School counsellors are available to help young people and their families if there are problems.)
- Get help if you suspect a young person may have a mental illness - many mental illnesses begin in adolescence. Early detection means they can be treated more successfully.
- Take a suicide threat seriously. It may be a cry for help, rather than a sign that someone genuinely intends suicide. But don't take chances. If you need help, contact the