

# National Suicide Awareness Month

## Week 2: Recognize Warning Signs



Dear friends,

It's the second week of National Suicide Prevention Month! Last week, we went over the facts regarding suicide in Ohio to better understand the issue at large. This week, we will be learning the next step of suicide prevention: recognizing warning signs.

Of course, suicide affects everyone, but there are some populations that are disproportionately affected. By knowing the risk factors and who is more prone to mental illness and suicidal ideation, you can better enact a community prevention plan.

Take a look at the statistics below to find out more. Understanding these trends will help the community look out for warning signs in a friend or loved one. Once you know the warning signs, you'll be able to help someone in need.

There are many ways mental illness and suicidal ideation can manifest. Take a look at some common and uncommon warning signs. It is important to remember that while these signs are often present, warning signs can manifest in ways that are not as obvious.

### SUICIDE WARNING SIGNS

- Talking about wanting to die or looking for ways to kill oneself
- Talking about feeling hopeless, trapped or in unbearable pain
- Talking about being a burden to others
- Increasing the use of alcohol or drugs
- Acting anxious, agitated or reckless
- Sleeping too little or too much
- Withdrawing from loved ones/feeling isolated
- Showing rage or talking about revenge



# Examples in Youths and Adults



## Withdrawal:

**Possible representation in teens and youth:** A once outgoing and involved high school student begins skipping class and extracurricular events. They start to spend a lot more time in their bedroom and are less friendly at school.

**Possible representation in adults:** Beforehand, your best friend used to get lunch with you every Sunday. It is very rare for them to cancel and if they do, they give plenty of notice. Lately, your friend has been cancelling last minute and makes up strange excuses. Sometimes they just don't even bother to let you know that they won't be coming, or they don't answer your texts or calls.

## Excessive Risk Taking:

**Possible representation in teens and youth:** About 6 months ago, your teen's long-term girlfriend of 2 years dumped him. Recently, you have noticed that he is bringing home different girls every week to hang out. You ask him if he is having sex with these girls and he discloses that he is having unprotected sex with most of them. You bring up the risk of STDs and pregnancy, and he simply brushes it off and says he doesn't really care.

**Possible representation in adults:** You notice that your adult sister who has always been fiscally responsible (pays mortgage on time, has a 401(k), has a college fund for her children, etc.) is suddenly taking a bunch of sick days from work and dipping into her savings and retirement funds. Additionally, she is spending a large portion of this money on alcohol and going to bars. She says that this is the only way she can feel anything anymore.

## Thwarted Belongingness

**Possible representation in teens and youth:** Your son has had the same group of friends since he was in kindergarten, they are always together, and you know his friends well. You haven't noticed anything different about his friends, but your son insists that they don't like him anymore.

**Possible representation in adults:** Your friend recently started graduate school after taking a few years off to work. She started classes two months ago, and she's beginning to say things like "I'm too old to be in school" and "I can't keep up". Your friend is very smart and has accomplished a lot in her professional career. She also seems to be doing well in her program, but she insists that she doesn't belong.



# Examples in Youths and Adults

## Showing Rage or Talking About Revenge

**Possible representation in teens and youth:** You notice that a tenth-grade student of yours who gets picked on and bullied in school has been making comments such as “you all are going to be sorry when I’m gone”. Moreover, the student has been slamming his books and other belongings around in extreme frustration.

**Possible representation in adults:** Your best friend is currently in the middle of a rough divorce. He has mentioned to you in the past that his wife never took his mental health struggles and depression seriously. After sharing a few beers with you one night, he says that his wife will never get the satisfaction of divorcing him because he will be dead before it is finalized. (note: this sign is also coupled with “talking about wanting to die or kill oneself, even in a joking manner)

## Sudden change in physical appearance and/or personality

**Possible representation in teens and youth:** It's normal for teens to experiment with their appearance. However, it can become a serious concern if they start to display other warning signs. For example, your student has always expressed interest in becoming a lawyer, but she has started getting large tattoos on her arms and hands. She usually displays proper hygiene, but it has become obvious that she is not showering enough and doesn't seem to care as much about her aspirations.

**Possible representation in adults:** You begin noticing that one of your best friends has started to look physically unwell for the past couple of months. Typically, he is dressed up, even for casual events and is usually in an upbeat mood. Now, he looks like he has bloodshot eyes all of the time, wears the same pair of clothes a few times a week, and is letting his facial hair go ungroomed. Additionally, he has taken quite a few sick days at work and cancels on you more.

**It is important to note that this is not a comprehensive list, rather it is to be used as a set of examples of what to look out for when you are concerned for a friend or family member**

Next week we will be talking about how to open up a dialogue when you notice warning signs. We will also be discussing how to reach out for help if you are the one struggling.