

Warning Signs That Youth May Need Referral to Counseling / Professional Help

Students give a range of signs and exhibit a variety of behaviors that can signal adults that they're struggling and may be overwhelmed. Many of the warning signs listed here can indicate that a student is depressed, is suicidal, or perhaps simply overwhelmed and without the skills to cope. Many students who are suicidal are also depressed, and treating only one of the two is not enough. Don't hesitate to ask for help from trained mental health workers. Students need our help when they're overwhelmed.

General Red Flags

Behaviors of concern

Difficulty falling or staying asleep
Difficulty waking up, tired all day
Can't eat enough or eating too much
Feeling "blue" for more than 2 weeks
Loss of interest in usual activities
Crying spells for no apparent reason
Problems sleeping
Trouble focusing or concentrating
Difficulty making decisions
Unintentional weight gain or loss
Restlessness
Feeling fatigued or weak
Cutting themselves or self-mutilation
Attempting suicide
Panic attacks, night terrors
Increased acting-out behaviors

Feelings of concern

Feeling worthless
Feeling easily annoyed
Feeling hopeless
Irritability
Feeling sad or down
Feeling life is not worth living
Feeling isolated or alone
Feeling undeserving
Feeling overwhelmed and stymied
Feeling like the world is against them
Feeling agitated
Feeling "in a fog"
Unexplained physical pain
Feeling a loss of energy, motivation
Feelings of guilt
Unexplained feelings of shame

Specific to Depression

Difficulty concentrating
Excessive or marked weight gain or loss
Anxiety, fears, irritability
Sleep disturbances or sleepy all the time
Marked changes in behavior
Withdrawn or self-isolating behaviors
Use of drugs or alcohol to try to cope
Recurrent nightmares
Overwhelmed by sadness, lasting weeks
Increase in acting-out behaviors
Loss of interest in usual pleasures
Eating disorders
Cutting, self-mutilation, self-abuse
Loss of self esteem
Listless, directionless, "lost" in life
Physical fatigue

Specific to Suicide

Giving away possessions, closing affairs
Talking excessively about death, funerals
Helpless, hopeless language, behaviors
Preoccupation with music, art of death
Often write about it; journals, MySpace, etc.
Poor choices about safety - risky behaviors
Withdrawn, self-isolating
No hope, no future plans
A suicide attempt is the biggest warning sign

Language kids may use:

I think about killing myself.
Life isn't worth living.
You won't be seeing me any more.
I have to do this my way.
I can't go on.
You'll be sorry when I'm gone.

