What should you do if you come upon a youngster who seems about to commit a violent act against self or others? The following points are extrapolated from guidelines usually suggested for responding when a student talks of suicide.

First, you must assess the situation and reduce the crisis state.

Then, here's some specific suggestions for

**When a Student Talks of Suicide . . .**

*What to do:*

- C Send someone for help; you'll need back-up.
- C Remain calm; remember the student is overwhelmed and confused as well as ambivalent.
- C Get vital statistics, including student's name, address, home phone number and parent's work number.
- C Encourage the student to talk. Listen! Listen! Listen! And when you respond, reflect back what you hear the student saying. Clarify, and help him/her define the problem, if you can.
- C Consider that the student is planning suicide. How does the student plan to do it, and how long has s/he been planning and thinking about it? What events motivated the student to take this step?
- C Clarify some immediate options (e.g., school and/or community people who can help).
- C If feasible, get an agreement to no-suicide ("No matter what, I will not kill myself.")
- C Involve parents for decision making and follow-through and provide for ongoing support and management of care (including checking regularly with parents and teachers).

*What to avoid:*

- C Don't leave the student alone and don't send the student away
- C Don't minimize the student's concerns or make light of the threat
- C Don't worry about silences; both you and the student need time to think
- C Don't fall into the trap of thinking that all the student needs is reassurance
- C Don't lose patience
- C Don't promise confidentiality -- promise help and privacy
- C Don't argue whether suicide is right or wrong

When you see a student who has attempted suicide, you must act promptly and decisively.

*What to do:*

- C Be directive. Tell the student, "Don't do that; stand there and talk with me." "Put that down." "Hand me that." "I'm listening."
- C Mobilize someone to inform an administrator and call 911; get others to help; you'll need back-up.
- C Clear the scene of those who are not needed.
- C An "administrator" should contact parents to advise them of the situation and that someone will call back immediately to direct the parent where to meet the youngster.
- C Look at the student directly. Speak in a calm, low voice tone. Buy time. Get the student to talk. Listen. Acknowledge his or her feelings "You are really angry." "You must be feeling really hurt."
- C Secure any weapon or pills; record the time any drugs were taken to provide this information to the emergency medical staff or police.
- C Get the student's name, address and phone.
- C Stay with the pupil; provide comfort.
- C As soon as feasible, secure any suicide note, record when the incident occurred, what the pupil said and did, etc.
- C Ask for a debriefing session as part of taking care of yourself after the event.

*What to avoid:*

- C Don't moralize ("You're young, you have everything to live for.")
- C Don't leave the student alone (even if the student has to go to the bathroom).
- C Don't move the student.

In all cases, show concern and ask questions in a straightforward and calm manner. Show you are willing to discuss suicide and that you aren't appalled or disgusted by it. Open lines of communication. Get care for the student.

**A Few References**


