



September is Suicide Prevention Month. Part of raising awareness is understanding that it is important to recognize that suicide prevention is everybody's business. More so, school staff and parents need to act as a front line of defense when it comes to suicide prevention. Taking the beginning of the school year to review the signs and best practices for prevention and early intervention.

The QPR Institute has split common signs into four categories to make recognition easier: direct verbal clues, indirect verbal clues, behavioral clues, and situational clues. Below are just a few common examples you may see in youth.

Direct Verbal Clues: a direct statement of intent

- "I want to end my life"
- "I wish I were dead"

Indirect Verbal Clues: alluding to thoughts of suicide

- "I just can't go on"
- "Pretty soon you won't have to worry about me"
- "I just want out"

Behavioral Clues: changes in the way an individual acts

- Isolating from loved ones
- Giving away prized possessions
- Unexplained anger and irritability
- Sudden depression or moodiness
- Sudden drop in academic performance
- Sudden loss of interest in passions and activities
- Sudden increase in substance misuse

Situational Clues: events in the individual's lived experience that increase suicidality

- Previous suicide attempt that has gone untreated
- Being expelled or fired
- Death of a loved one, especially by suicide

As a member of school staff or parent to youth, you will likely be one of the first to notice these behaviors. If you are concerned at all, you should be direct and ask if someone is thinking of suicide. Studies tell us that you cannot put the idea of suicide in someone's head by talking about it. The goal of recognizing these signs, checking in, and spreading awareness is getting at-risk youth to professional help

Keep in mind, after you ask someone if they are considering suicide, that opening up takes a lot of courage; so, making an individual feel safe to share how they are feeling is the most important step of your conversation. Foster an environment of compassion and understanding. For example, be an active listener and put other distractions like your phone or work away. Be careful to avoid judgement. Judgement may seem easy to avoid, but such a vulnerable conversation can cause a strong sense of worry and urgency. Avoid phrases like “you’re not thinking of doing anything stupid, are you?” or “suicide is a bad/selfish idea”. Those with suicidal ideation feel hopeless, and you may be the one person they reach out to; it is important they feel safe and heard.

This is a great time of year to review the resources you have access to. Know your school’s protocol when it comes to students with thoughts of suicide. Who should you refer to, who needs to know, and what additional services or supports does your school provide? One such resource available to everyone 24/7 is the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. Keep quick and easy access to your resources; someone can exhibit signs or open up to you at any time, and staying prepared could save a life.

988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline

<https://988lifeline.org/promote-national-suicide-prevention-month/>

Sources

Quinnett, Paul G. “QPR Institute: Practical and Proven Suicide Prevention Training.” *QPR Institute | Practical and Proven Suicide Prevention Training QPR Institute (En-US)*, qprinstitute.com/instructor. Accessed 25 Aug. 2026.

