

Characteristics of Suicidal Adolescents

In summary, the characteristics most typical of adolescents in our study which in turn may be used as diagnostic clues to potential suicide are as follows:

1. The subject was most likely a white female of age 15-20 years.
2. There was a history of difficult family relations which may have been manifest in any number of ways--parental conflict, parent-child conflict, child abuse, parental abuse of alcohol/drugs and sibling conflict.
3. The youth had typically lost a parent by either death, desertion or divorce sometime earlier in his/her life. The parent most generally no longer in the home was the father.
4. The moods most characteristic of the youth prior to the attempt were depression and intense anger.
5. School difficulties such as academic or attendance problems, faulty peer relationships, and discipline problems were prominent.
6. The youth tended to be impulsive.
7. Usually the adolescent was living with a step-parent in the home, but may have been living with only one parent or alone.
8. There may have been a history of previous attempts.
9. The subject may have experienced significant psychological problems in the past. Rebellion toward authority and antisocial characteristics were common.
10. There may be a history of previous psychological treatment and its failure.
11. Drug and alcohol abuse were common characteristics of the subjects.
12. The attempt tended to be precipitated by friction with a love object such as a boyfriend, girlfriend, parent or spouse.

Times at which intervention procedures might be attempted include the point at which the young person experiences difficulty at school, visits a doctor, makes a suicidal gesture, is arrested, experiences family problems or shows signs of heavy alcohol or drug use.

Kaplan, David W., Wantz, Richard A., & Withers, Larry E.
Adolescent Suicide. American Psychological Association
Annual Convention, Toronto, August, 1984, 24.