

## WARNING SIGNALS: A PLEA FOR HELP

At least 75% of all youth who commit suicide exhibit a series of common behaviors which, if understood, become important clues for us to notice. Not all of the warning signals are evident in each case, nor does a single person receive all of the clues. For this reason, it is important that we all develop a sensitivity to warning signals and trust our instincts enough to report the "gut feeling" to others who also may have recognized the clues.

### WARNING SIGNALS

- change in school work or attendance
- withdrawal from people
- insomnia or oversleeping
- preoccupation with talking about suicide
- giving away possessions
- feelings of helplessness, anxiety, guilt
- change from depression to light heartedness
- an event that can cause deep depression or worthlessness (often a loss)
- recovering from severe depression
- occurrence of suicidal threats
- a previous suicide attempt
- sudden beginning of self-destructive acts, (like drinking, drugs, etc.)
- disruptive/violent in dealing with others
- irrational behavior, signs of severe mental illness
- rapid weight gain or loss
- your "gut feeling"

In addition to the general warning signals which we might use to identify a person who is thinking of self-destruction, there are more specific signals which might indicate that the person is beyond the thinking stage and actually planning for death.

### URGENT WARNING SIGNALS

- giving away possessions
- unexpected elation

- development of a specific plan
- suddenly not talking about suicide anymore
- breaking off completely from important relationships

As we assess the student's behavior and become convinced that there is a problem, we must evaluate the immediacy of the situation. The following four questions have been designed to provide information which will indicate the urgency for action. A "yes" response to any of the four questions should set in motion all available resources to intervene in what might be a lethal situation.

#### ASSESSING IMMEDIATE LETHALITY

1. Has the person attempted suicide in the past?
2. Does the person have a specific plan for suicide?
3. Is the plan lethal, specific, and is the method of death available?
4. Has a person in the immediate family or a relative ever attempted or committed suicide?