Teenage Suicide Essay, Research Paper

The teenage suicide rate has risen to crisis proportions over the past 20 years. Between 1957 and 1975, the rate of suicide among 15 to 24 year olds tripled; amond Native American adolescentws, the suicide rate increased 1000% (TEENAGERS IN CRISIS, 1983). It is estimated that 5,000 to 6,000 teenagers kill themselves each year, and at least ten times that many attempt to do so. Because many suicide attempts go unreported or are reported as accidents, the estimated number may be as high as 500,000 per year. While females attempts suicide more often than males, at a rate of 4:1, males “succeed” more often at the same rate(SUICIDE AMONG SCHOOL AGE YOUTH, 1984).The rising rate has been explained as a reaction to the stress inherent in adolescence compounded by increasing stress in the environment. Adolescence is a time when ordinary levels of stress are heightened by physical, psychological, emotional, and social changes. Our achievement-oriented, highly competetive society puts pressure on teens to succeed, often forcing them to set unrealistically high personal expectation. There is increased pressure to stay in school, where success is narrowly defined adn difficult to achieve (Rosenkrantz, 1978).WARNING SIGNS Many behavioral and verbal clues can alert the informed parent, teacher, counselor, or friend to an adolescent’s suicidal intentions. A teen at risk of committing suicide is experiencing deep depression, which may be indicated by loss of weight, appetitie or interest in personal appearance; a change in sleeping pattern; fatigue; and feelings of hopelessness and low self-esteem. Sudden behavioral changes may occur: the youth may become disruptive, violent, or hostile toward family and friends; or unexplainably moody, suspicious, anxious, or selfish. He or she may spend a great deal of time daydreamig, fantasizing, or imagining ills, in extreme cases experiencing memory lapses or hallucinations.Some signals should come through loud and clear: the teenager may express a desire to die, threaten to commit suicide, or inform friends of a plan. Self-abusive acts such as cutting off hair and self-inflicting cigarette burns are obvious suicidal gestures. The teen may develop a preoccupation with death and dying, make arrangements to give away prized possesisons, withdraw from therapeutic help, or rapidly lose interest in once valued activities and objects.

PREVENTION Community members, mental health professionals, school personnel, peers, and parents can play major roles in the prevention of teenage suicide. Programs that build adolescents’ self-esteem and inspire a sense of inclusion in society rather than alienation from it have been found to be particularly effective.Peers are crucial to suicide prevention. According to one survey, 93% of the students reported they would turn to a friend before a teacher, parent or spiritual guide in a time of crisis (TEENAGERS IN CRISIS, 1983). Peers can form student support groups and , once educated themselves, can train others to be peer counselors.Parents need to be as open and as attentive as possible to the adolescent children’t difficulties. The most effective suicide prevention technique parents can exercise is to maintain open lines of communication with their children. Sometimes teens hide their problems, not wanting to burden the people they love. It is extremely important to assure teens that they can share their troubles, and gain support in the process. Parents are encouraged to talk about suicide with their children, and to educate themselves by forming study groups with other parents, or by attending parent-teacher or parent-counselor education sessions. Once trained, parents can help to staff a crisis hotline in their community. Parents also need to be involved in the counseling process if a teen has suicidal tendencies. These activities may both alleviate parents’ fears of the unknown and assure teenagers that their parents care.It is possible, through the coordinated actions of parents, peers, school personnel, and the community at large, to reverse the growing trend of teenage suicide. Counselors can make the difference, by providing the leadership and motiviation to guide the efforts of youngsters and adults.