MEDIA RELEASE
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Know the Causes and Signs of Teenage Suicide, says LifeLine Southern Africa

Being a teen is not easy. They experience strong feelings of stress, confusion, self-doubt, pressure to succeed and a host of other feelings. For some, living through their parents' divorce or having to move to a new community can be very unsettling and can intensify their self-doubt. Some teens worry about sexuality and relationships, wondering if their feelings and attractions are normal, or if they will be loved and accepted. Others struggle with body image and eating disorders, trying to reach impossible ideals, while others have learning or attention problems that make it hard for them to succeed at school, leaving them feeling disappointed in themselves or believing that they are disappointing others.

There are many new social, academic and personal pressures, and for teens who have additional problems to deal with, such as living in violent or abusive environments, life can be even more difficult. Therefore, for some teens, suicide may appear to be a solution to their problems.

What are the warning signs?

- Appearing depressed or sad most of the time
- Feelings of hopelessness
- Withdrawing from family and friends
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Feeling tired most of the time
- Gaining or losing a significant amount of weight
- Writing poems or notes about suicide or death
- Losing interest in most activities, persistent boredom
- Giving away special possessions
- Frequently complaining about physical symptoms e.g. headaches;
- Neglecting personal appearance
- Performing poorly at school
- Abusing drugs or alcohol
- Facing a perceived failure or humiliating situation
- Violent actions, rebellious behaviour or running away
- Marked personality change
- Not tolerating praise or rewards
- Talking about death or suicide in general

Parents need to talk to their child about their concern, should one or more of these signs occur. It is almost too painful for a parent to examine the fact that a teenager could be so unhappy that he would choose to kill himself. However, with the increasing prevalence of teen suicides, no parent can afford to ignore the possibility. Therefore, if a child or adolescent says they want to kill themselves, always take the statement seriously and immediately seek assistance. Try not to argue with them, or try to attempt to make them feel guilty for considering suicide. Instead, try to explore the reasons why the teenager is so unhappy and feels that suicide is the only solution. Listen to their answers and be aware of the desperate situation they might find themselves in,

and do not ignore their pain. Perceived lack of parental interest in their teenager may be considered an important factor in teenage suicide. According to one study, 90% of suicidal teenagers believed their families did not understand them.