

WARNING SIGNS OF SUICIDE CONTAGION IN THE COMMUNITY

When a suspected suicide or a serious attempt occurs, there is the possibility that this may lead to further suicide attempts and deaths. This occurs through the process of contagion where the original suicide influences others to attempt or complete suicide. Adolescents and young adults are more vulnerable to the effects of suicidal contagion. However, contagion is also known to occur in older populations.

Practice based warning signs for contagion may include (but are not limited to):

- evidence of mass texting about completed suicides(s) or suicide attempt(s);
- an increase in suicide attempts in the community and other reported suicidal behaviour;
- known links between those who die by suicide or those who make attempts e.g., belong to same social group, club, gang, etc;
- similarities between those who have completed suicide or those who have made an attempt, e.g., same gender, similar age, same method used;
- more than one suicide in the same location, e.g., same beach or park, creating a “hotspot”
- mass gatherings of young people, often at makeshift shrines or graves;
- concerning activity related to suicide (e.g., memorials for the deceased, noted ideation) on social networking sites such Facebook and Bebo;
- a heightened emotional atmosphere in the community, (e.g., people are talking about the suspected suicides or deaths at the supermarket, on the streets, at sports clubs, etc.) and an increased concern about suicide in the community.

If any of these warning signs are noted, please consult with CASA’s Community Postvention Response Service, email cprs@casa.org.nz or Freephone 0800 448 908.

References

1. Hazell , P. (1993). *Adolescent suicide clusters: Evidence, mechanisms and prevention*. Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry, 27, 653-665.
2. Davidson, L.E. (1989). *Suicide clusters and youth*. In *Suicide Amongst Youth: perspectives on risk and prevention*. Edited by C, Pfeffer. American Psychiatric Press, Washington DC.
3. Sacks and Eth. *Management of Suicide Clusters – Canterbury Suicide Project*.
4. SIEC alert#36, July 1999. *The challenge of suicide clusters*.
5. *Youth Suicide Clusters – what you must know to recognise and respond to youth suicide contagion*. April 15 2010 .Wellaware Webinar http://www.wellaware.org/pdf/Well_Aware%20Webinar_Youth_Contagion.pdf