

# Teens give warning before suicide attempt

**S**UICIDE IS ONE of life's greatest contradictions. The entire thrust of human existence seems ultimately directed toward survival. But with one conscious, premeditated act, an individual can choose irrevocably to forfeit his most prized possession — life itself.

When a teen-ager commits suicide, the contradiction seems even greater and more tragic because youth, in most of our minds, symbolizes enthusiasm, vitality, unfulfilled promise — not self-destructive desperation.

**THE PROBLEM** of teen-age suicide is real. One out of every 1,800 teen-agers will attempt to take his or her life each year.

Twelve percent of all suicide attempts in the United States are made by adolescents. Suicide is the third or fourth leading cause of death among adolescents. And these statistics are

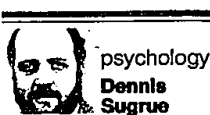
conservative.

The popular myth has been that the teen-age suicide attempter is a hysterical female dramatically overreacting to a minor disappointment like a break-up with a boyfriend. The myth also suggests this person is only looking for attention, and if she succeeds in killing herself, it was an accident.

**THIS MYTH** is inaccurate and dangerously misleading.

Although female adolescents attempt suicide three times as often as males, the males are three times more often successful.

Rarely is a suicide attempt an impulsive reaction to a single event. If there was a triggering disappointment, it was more likely the final straw. Most teens who attempt suicide have been struggling for a long time with feelings of depression and alienation.



psychology  
**Dennis Sugrue**

Although it is true that the majority of teen-age suicide attempters do not really intend to die, to discount the significance of any suicidal gesture can have lethal consequences.

**USUALLY THERE** are warning signs when adolescents are in emotional trouble.

As a result of being depressed, they may complain of always being fatigued. Often they will describe numerous aches and pains and will be overly worried about their health. They will have difficulty concentrat-

ing, which often leads to a dramatic drop in school performance.

Some troubled youth will become very restless, as if they were desperately searching for something to distract their thoughts from painful inner realities. They frantically move from one friendliness to the next as if they are searching for something they can't find.

**DRAMATIC CHANGES** in behavior always should be viewed as a serious warning sign.

For example, rebelliousness and flagrant disregard for authority may suddenly emerge. The distinctive feature of this delinquent behavior is that it is obvious and appears to invite detection.

Some of those behaviors are the natural result of depression; others represent attempts to gain the attention of others. When the troubled teen feels unsuccessful in obtaining attention and

support from adults, suicide becomes the dramatic last resort effort to break through the barrier and be heard.

Because of this, parents are often viewed as being responsible for their child's suicidal attempt. This is unfortunate and unfair. I have worked with enough families to be convinced that many parents of suicide attempters are good people who genuinely love their kids.

If they are guilty of any crime, it's a crime any of us can easily be guilty of — getting too caught up in the day to day distractions of work, home and social obligations. It can become quite easy at times to take the teen-ager for granted or to pull back a bit from the teen because he or she is "going through that stage" and is so hard to understand.

**HOW CAN WE** prevent teen-age suicide?

Obviously wholesome communication in the home can help. Parents and teachers need to recognize the signs of depression described above.

No reference to suicide, even in passing, should be taken lightly. If in doubt, consult someone knowledgeable about teen-age behavior.

The good news is that the risk of suicidal behavior is dramatically reduced if the adolescent does indeed finally get our attention, attention marked by genuine interest, open-mindedness and concern.

Dennis Sugrue, Ph.D., is a Farmington Hills resident and a clinical psychologist at Henry Ford Hospital. He welcomes questions and topics for future articles, but is unable to answer questions on an individual basis. Questions and topics may be sent to this newspaper.

## Auto sales park business upturn

Thanks to an auto sales boom, the Michigan economy rose three points in August to a record high of 141, as measured by the Michigan business activity index (MBAI).

The index stands one point ahead of the August 1984 level and 5 percent ahead of 1984 on a year-to-date basis. The record comes after almost three straight years of national economic recovery.

Manufacturers Bank staff economist Patrick L. Anderson said that the auto industry accounted for much of the strong showing.

**"WHENEVER** U.S. consumers receive increased income after taxes and inflation, they spend some of that on cars," he said.

The past three years have seen federal income taxes cut, inflation controlled, and income growing rapidly. Michigan's rejuvenated automobile industry particularly benefited from those changes, although the entire state's economy is better as a result.

"In August, auto and truck production was very strong, although August is usually a slow month, and steel production was also strong."

"Automobile sales in the state were not as im-

pressive, although consumers may have postponed purchases until the availability of cut-rate financing in late August and early September.

"I anticipate that September's car sales will show a marked increase," he said.

**"IRONICALLY,"** Anderson said, "the MBAI shot up 10 points to 140 in August 1984 because of a pre-strike auto production surge, before dropping to 126 in September. Now, one year later, we have not only recouped the strike losses but exceeded the previous high."

The MBAI is compiled monthly from 11 different

measures of Michigan economic activity by the economics department of Manufacturers Bank. It is seasonally adjusted and corrected for inflation. The index's 100 base is the year 1967.

In August, auto and truck production, steel production and energy consumption increased, while labor market activity was roughly unchanged and car sales fell off somewhat.

As with all economic statistics, short-term variations must be interpreted cautiously, Anderson said, but the MBAI has proven to be a reliable indicator and has a 28-year record of accurately recording the business cycle in Michigan's economy.

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