

High-Performing Students: A High-Risk Population

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Who We Are

- Founded in honor of Larry Courtnage's Daughter, Kim
- We strive to:
 - Connect people to resources
 - Increase awareness about mental health and suicide prevention
 - Offer compassion and support to those who lose loved ones to suicide through the Metro Area LOSS Team
 - Break down stigma often associated with seeking mental health care
 - Provide grants to local nonprofits



Larry and Kathy Courtnage Family

Our Purpose Today

As a community-driven nonprofit specializing in suicide prevention and mental health awareness, we at The Kim Foundation have seen a substantial amount of attention placed on students who are uninvolved or performing poorly in school. While these efforts are necessary, we shouldn't forget about another high-risk population: high-performing students.

This presentation will focus on the relationship between the pressure of perfection and suicide ideation among high-performing students. We will address the “why” behind this concern, the risk factors specific to high-performing students, and the warning signs. We will provide strategies you can use to help these students manage their stress and anxiety.



Objectives

Objective 1



Participants will be able to identify suicide risk factors and warning signs specific to high-performing students.

Objective 2



Participants will be able to determine that how a school district responds to the suicide of a high-performing student can be, in and of itself, preventative.

Objective 3



Participants will be capable of developing a suicide prevention plan specific to at-risk, high-achieving students at their schools.

The Facts



Suicide is the second leading cause of death in individuals age 10-34.



Teenage girls attempt suicide 3x as often as teenage boys. However, males are 4x more likely to die by suicide.



Approximately 20% of gifted students suffer from perfectionism to a damaging degree.

Characteristics of High-Achievers That Are Also Suicide Risk Factors

Perfectionism

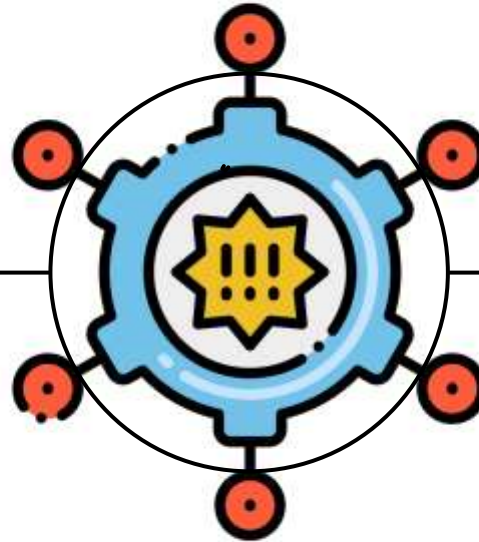
To some high-achieving students, doing their best is not good enough, no matter how well they perform. This can lead to an absence of self-worth. Many believe they are loved for their grades and talents, so they cannot allow themselves to fail.

Supersensitivity

High-achieving students exhibit a heightened awareness of world problems and their inability to have an effect on those problems lead to feelings of helplessness.

Sensory Excitability

High energy levels, emotional intensity, unusual capacity to care, and insatiable love of learning coupled with the inability to deal with complex and intense feelings may be a source of vulnerability that can contribute to suicidal thoughts.



De Souza Fleith, D, "Suicide Among Gifted Adolescents: How To Prevent It" 2001
<https://nrcgt.uconn.edu/NEWSLETTERS/SPRING012/>

Spyker, M., "In Giftedness, Is There More Darkness?" 2017 <https://www.wm.edu/news/stories/2017/in-giftedness,-is-there-more-darkness.php>

Social Isolation

Feelings of being abnormal or experiencing rejection from peers can lead the talented adolescent to experience severe identity problems.






Overcommitment

High-achievers often have difficulty saying "no" out of fear of disappointing others. They tend to overcommit and overextend. This leads to increased stress and anxiety.

Depression & Anxiety

For some high-achieving students, they find it difficult to ask for help. They think they need to be able to figure it out on their own. This can lead to unhealthy coping mechanisms.

Suicide Warning Signs in High-Achieving Students

Suicide Threats	Sudden Changes in Behavior	Withdrawal	Feelings of Worthlessness	Giving Away Prized Possessions
				
<p>While this may seem like an obvious warning sign, adolescents who talk about killing themselves are often accused of seeking attention or being dramatic. Adults must always take these threats seriously.</p>	<p>High-achieving students may begin to perform poorly in school, skip school, neglect personal hygiene, lose interest in activities they used to love, experience changes in sleep patterns, or sudden use of drugs or alcohol.</p>	<p>Students may begin to intentionally distance themselves from friends and loved ones. They might want to spend all their time isolated in their rooms.</p>	<p>Saying things like “I cannot do anything right,” “I am stupid,” “I don’t matter,” can indicate feelings of worthlessness. They may perceive themselves as unlovable.</p>	<p>Adolescents may give away their favorite items to friends, saying they will not need them anymore.</p>

Strategies to Help High-Achievers Manage Stress

Encourage Mindfulness

Mindfulness discourages “Future Tripping,” which causes anxiety from overthinking, and attempting to over-engineer the future as if it’s all within our control.

* Mindful Moments * 54321 Grounding Technique *

Limit Commitments

Suggest the “Rule of Three” – students should pick *no more than* three extracurricular activities. Pick those that bring them joy and relieve stress rather than add stress.

Involve Parents

Provide parents with resources explaining the importance of an open dialogue regarding their child’s mental health. Invite mental health professionals to speak at mandatory parent nights.

Encourage Creativity

If an artistic student is hesitant to take Art II because it may “do nothing” for their GPA, encourage them to take it anyway. Students with creative outlets and balanced academic schedules have lower stress.

A School's Response to Suicide Can Serve as Prevention

Do's

- Obtain family's blessing to announce cause of death as suicide.
- Disseminate information via written statement.
- Identify those at risk to prevent contagion: those at risk include students with history of suicide ideation, experiencing depression, history of tragic loss, who may feel responsibility (i.e. a bully or friend who thinks they should have intervened), and anyone who may identify with deceased
- Coordinate mobile crisis response to provide support for students, their parents, faculty, and staff. Be sure to notify surrounding schools as their students may know the victim and need support as well.

Don'ts

- Give false information or too much information. Never discuss the means used or put forward any specific factors that led to the student's death.
- Oversimplify the suicide as an "understandable" response to the victim's stressful situation or their membership to any particular group encountering discrimination. This can encourage identification with the victim and can potentially normalize the suicide.
- Schools are strongly discouraged from holding funerals or memorial services on school property. Doing so may create a mental connection between grief and the school building, making healing even more difficult.

Suicide Prevention Resources for Schools

- **Nebraska School Suicide Prevention and Postvention Toolkit**
<https://thekimfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/NE-School-Suicide-Prevention-and-Postvention-Toolkit-1.pdf>
- **Hope Squad** <https://hopesquad.com/>



Talk with us.



If you or someone you
know needs support now,
call or text 988 or chat
988lifeline.org

Questions?

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