

NEW MEXICO INJURY ATTORNEY BLOG

PUBLISHED BY
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July 23, 2010

Teen Suicide Warning Signs

KOAT News recently reported that teen suicide rates were rising in Rio Rancho. In 2008, Rio Rancho recorded 10 suicides, while in 2009, the rate jumped to 18. So far in 2010, there have been 5. The [New Mexico Suicide Prevention Coalition](#) claims that New Mexico steadily ranks in the top five states in the nation for suicides. Consequently, suicide is the number two killer of individuals aged 15-24 in New Mexico.

It is very important to know the risks and signs of suicide. It is not always easy to tell. Some categories are easier to detect than others. Those who exhibit or have been diagnosed with mental health disorders are at a high risk for suicidal behavior, as are those who have substance abuse problems. Family history may be a risk factor particularly cases involving a history of trauma or abuse. A lack of social support or feelings of isolation can spur relationship difficulties along with suicidal thinking.

One very important influence that seems to be at play with teen suicide is media coverage. Public attention, particularly media coverage, can and often does result in copycat behavior. In fact, there is a name for it, the *Werther Effect*, named for the novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther* by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe in which young Werther ultimately commits suicide. Following the release of the novel, there was a rash of copycat suicides, among the first documented instances of the phenomenon.

Studies show that public attention has a direct bearing on copycat suicides with greater numbers associated with greater attention. Thus significant media coverage can have tragic and unintended consequences. The effect seems to have an inordinate effect on teens as may be reflected in the Rio Rancho numbers, as well as the numbers that occur on the reservations and other communities that suffer sudden and unexplained rise in suicide rates. This is something that all parents should take extremely seriously where there has been a suicide in the community.

The following warning signs should raise concern for parents, particularly following another suicide in the community:

- 1) depression, including loss of interest in daily activities,
- 2) withdrawal from friends and/or family,
- 3) change in sleep, as well as anxiety or fatigue,

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- 4) change in weight or appetite,
- 5) feelings of guilt, hopelessness or worthlessness,
- 6) thoughts of death or wishes to be dead,
- 7) looking for ways to kill oneself, including reckless or risky behavior,
- 8) increased substance use,
- 9) giving away treasured belongings, and
- 10) irritability, anger or rage

Yet, there are also factors that can help a person get past suicidal thoughts. These include the effective treatment of mental or substance abuse disorders, deep family and relational connections, skill building in conflict resolution and problem solving, cultural, community and religious ties, and counseling.

If you or someone you know may be considering suicide, please contact the [New Mexico Suicide Prevention Coalition](#) at 505-401-9382. Additional resources are available through [The New Mexico Suicide & Crisis Hotline](#) at 1-800-SUICIDE and the [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#) at 1-800-273-TALK.

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