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*Dema Guinn — Nevada*

*"Teenage drinking problems account for tens of thousands of highway deaths and nearly half of all teenage suicides each year. Dependence on alcohol is becoming a greater problem each year, and it is the drug of choice among our high school students. Every school needs a comprehensive alcohol policy and program. Students need to be informed on what alcohol can do to their body, mind, and behavior, so they can make the proper choice when confronted with alcohol." —Dema Guinn*

### Public and Private Partners

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National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism  
The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

#### Funding Partners

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United National Indian Tribal Youth  
U.S. Conference of Mayors  
Vanderbilt University School of Nursing

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## Substance Abuse May Escalate Suicidal Ideas to Attempts in Teens

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A study in the September issue of the *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* provides important insights into the relationships between psychiatric disorders and adolescent suicide, suggesting that teens who abuse drugs or alcohol are more likely to progress from suicidal thoughts to suicide attempts.

The research assessed the links among suicidal ideas, suicide attempts, and adolescent psychiatric disorders in a random sample of nearly 1,300 children aged 9 to 17 years. Of these, 67 had had suicidal thoughts and 42 had made suicide attempts. Child and adolescent psychiatrist and epidemiologist Madelyn S. Gould of Columbia University led the research.

After adjustment for other characteristics such as age and gender, the study indicated that suicide attempts were significantly more likely for youngsters with mood disorders (depression and bipolar disorder), anxiety disorders, and substance abuse or dependence issues.

Overall, the risk of attempted suicide within this age group was about three percent. The rate of suicide attempts rose to 22 percent in children with major depression and 25 percent in those with substance abuse or dependence.

For children with two or more disorders, the rate of suicidal ideation was eight times higher than normal, while the rate of suicide attempts was 18 times higher than normal.

Substance abuse or dependence was specifically related to suicide attempts. Substance abuse appeared to play a key role in the transition from suicidal thoughts to actual suicide attempts.

Certain other psychiatric symptoms also raised the risk of suicide. Panic attacks nearly tripled suicide risk for girls, while aggressive behavior doubled suicide risk among boys. Being a teenage runaway nearly tripled suicide risk. Perfectionism, a personality characteristic linked to teen suicide in previous studies, was not a significant factor in this study.

Child and adolescent psychiatrists have long noted that psychiatric disorders are a risk factor for suicidal ideas and behaviors in young people. However, few studies have examined the effects of specific psychiatric disorders on suicide risk.

These study findings will help child and adolescent psychiatrists and other professionals assess suicide risk among children and adolescents. Substance abuse appears to be a particularly important factor when kids who have suicidal thoughts go on to make suicide attempts. Substance abuse rates are higher among boys and in older children, and these groups are the most likely to make completed suicide attempts.