

What Should You Do If You Think Someone May Be Suicidal?

- 1) Trust your instincts. The person may or may not show some of the signs. Even if you're not sure, don't be afraid about asking the person if he or she is feeling suicidal. You won't be putting ideas into someone's head, but instead are bringing out a topic that has most likely been thought of already.
- 2) Does the person have a plan for suicide? Having a plan means the person is that much more serious about intending suicide.
- 3) Does he or she have means to carry out the plan? Talking about pills or guns is much more serious if the person actually has them in possession, or has access to them.
- 4) Does the person have a history of prior suicide attempts? The more times a person has already attempted suicide, the greater the risk of succeeding.
- 5) Get involved. Some people worry that if they "butt in," the person might be angry with them. If someone is feeling suicidal, the most important thing you can provide is support and unconditional acceptance.
- 6) Recognize that he/she is in almost unbearable pain. Listen to the person, and accept feelings without judging or discounting them.
- 7) Tell the person you care about him/her, and want to help make a plan to feel better.
- 8) Call a crisis line yourself to get information and suggestions – counselors can give you some tips as well as some starting resources for developing a plan to get the person the care needed.
- 9) If you can't develop a plan and a suicide attempt seems to be imminent, don't wait – get help. You could be saving a life. Call a local crisis center or dial 911 if it is an emergency. **Do not leave the person alone.**
- 10) Be sure to take care of yourself as well. It can be very scary when someone close to you is contemplating suicide, and can be difficult to talk about. Find someone that you trust, whether a friend, other family member, religious member, or counselor, to share your feelings.

Source: www.helpguide.org/mental/suicide_prevention.htm

More Ways To Be Helpful To Someone Who Is Threatening Suicide:

1. Be direct. Talk openly and matter-of-factly about suicide.
2. Be willing to listen. Allow expressions of feelings. Accept the feelings.
3. Be non-judgmental. Don't debate whether suicide is right or wrong, or whether feelings are good or bad. Don't lecture on the value of life.
4. Get involved. Become available. Show interest and support.
5. Don't dare him or her to do it.
6. Don't act shocked. This will put distance between you.
7. Don't be sworn to secrecy. Seek support.
8. Offer hope that alternatives are available but do not offer glib reassurance.
9. Take action. Remove means, such as guns or stockpiled pills.
10. Get help from persons or agencies specializing in crisis intervention and suicide prevention.

Additional Online Resources: Understanding and Helping the Suicidal Person - Provides helpful tips on how to help a suicidal person. (The American Association of Suicidology) Source: www.suicidology.org

Suicidal Ideation

People usually attempt suicide to block seemingly unbearable emotional pain. It is a cry for help. Suicidal thoughts reveal that the person's ability to cope is being overwhelmed.

Verbal signs that a person may have suicidal thoughts include direct statements like "I want to die" or "I don't want to live anymore." He/she may also make indirect statements like "I want to go to sleep and never wake up," or "I can't take this anymore."

What to do if you suspect someone may be contemplating suicide:

1. Be aware of the warning signs.
2. Be available. Show interest and support.
3. Be willing to listen. Allow expression of feelings. Reflect feelings accurately.
4. Offer empathy, not sympathy.
5. Be non-judgmental; even if you feel strongly that suicide is going against God's will.
6. Show calm confidence—you are going to help.
7. Be direct. Ask them openly if they are thinking of suicide. Discuss the idea directly and honestly.
8. If they say they are thinking of suicide, ask the following:

- “Do you have a plan?” If YES, ask when, how, with what, where?
 - “Can you act on the plan now?” Are the means available?
 - “Have you attempted suicide before?” If YES, ask when, how, with what, where?
 - “What problem is your suicide designed to solve?”
 - “Who have you tried to talk about this with besides me? Did they listen? “Who may I contact who can be supportive to you right now when you are in so much pain?”
9. Offer hope that alternatives are available. However, be careful not to offer empty reassurances. It only proves you don’t understand.
 10. Help is available. Let them know it.
 11. Let them know that you genuinely care what happens to them. You might say something like; “I care what happens to you very much. I DON’T WANT YOU TO DIE!”
 12. Try to obtain a “contract” (a promise) from him/her to not take any action.
 13. Take action. If they have a plan, do not leave them alone. Get help.
 14. Finally, if the person has a plan and cannot make a contract for safety, hospitalize.

What not to do if you suspect someone is contemplating suicide:

1. Don’t minimize the problem.
2. Don’t try to argue them out of it.
3. Don’t tell them they will feel better tomorrow.
4. Don’t debate whether suicide is right or wrong, or if feelings are good or bad. Now is not the time for a lecture on the value and purpose of life.
5. Don’t give advice by telling them what they should do.
6. Don’t ask “why?” This encourages defensiveness.
7. Don’t act shocked. This will put distance between you.
8. Don’t be sworn to secrecy. NEVER promise to keep it a secret. Threats of suicide and confidentiality cannot coexist.

Communication Barriers (things NOT to say)

- “That’s no reason to kill yourself.”
- “You shouldn’t talk like that.”
- “You will feel differently tomorrow.”
- “Just forget about it.”
- “You shouldn’t feel that way.”
- “You’ve got so much going for you that others don’t have.”
- “You’re only thinking of yourself.”