

Suicide Warning Signs

Talking about suicide	Any talk about suicide, dying, or self-harm. Includes statements such as "I wish I hadn't been born," "If I see you again....," "I want out," and "I'd be better off dead."
Seeking out lethal means	Looking for ways to commit suicide. Seeking access to guns, pills, knives, or other objects that could be used in a suicide attempt.
Preoccupation with death	Unusual focus on death, dying, or violence. Writing poems or stories about death.
No hope for the future	Feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, and being trapped ("There's no way out"). Belief that things will never get better or change.
Self-loathing, self-hatred	Feelings of worthlessness, guilt, shame, and self-hatred. Feeling like a burden ("Everyone would be better off without me").
Getting affairs in order	Making out a will. Giving away prized possessions. Making arrangements for family members.
Saying goodbye	Unusual or unexpected visits or calls to family and friends. Saying goodbye to people as if they won't be seen again.
Withdrawing from others	Withdrawing from friends and family. Increasing social isolation. Desire to be left alone.
Self-destructive behavior	Increased alcohol or drug use, reckless driving, unsafe sex. Taking unnecessary risks as if they have a "death wish".
Sudden sense of calm	A sudden sense of calm and happiness after being extremely depressed can mean that the person has made a decision to commit suicide.

Suicide prevention tip #1: Speak up if you're worried

If you spot the warning signs of suicide in someone you care about, you may wonder if it's a good idea to say anything. What if you're wrong? What if the person gets angry? Even worse, what if you plant the idea in your friend or family member's head? In such situations, it's natural to feel uncomfortable or afraid. But anyone who talks about suicide or shows other warning signs needs immediate help—the sooner the better.

Talking to a person about suicide

If you're unsure whether someone is suicidal, the best way to find out is to ask. You can't make a person suicidal by showing that you care. In fact, giving the individual the opportunity to express his or her feelings may prevent a suicide attempt. The person may even be relieved that you brought up the issue.

Here are some questions you can ask:

- Have you ever thought that you'd be better off dead or that if you died, it wouldn't matter?
- Have you thought about harming yourself?
- Are you thinking about suicide?

Suicide prevention tip #2: Respond quickly in a crisis

If a friend or family member tells you that he or she is thinking about death or suicide, it's important to evaluate the immediate danger the person is in. Those at the highest risk for committing suicide in the near future have a specific suicide plan, the means to carry out the plan, a time schedule for doing it, and an intention to do it.

Level of Suicide Risk

Low — Some suicidal thoughts. No suicide plan.

Says he or she won't commit suicide.

Moderate — Suicidal thoughts. Vague plan that isn't very lethal. Says he or she won't commit suicide.

High — Suicidal thoughts. Specific plan that is highly lethal. Says he or she won't commit suicide.

Severe — Suicidal thoughts. Specific plan that is highly lethal. Says he or she will commit suicide.

The following questions can help you assess the immediate risk for suicide:

- Do you have a suicide plan?
- Do you have what you need to carry out your plan (pills, gun, etc.)?
- Do you know when you would do it?
- Do you intend to commit suicide?

If a suicide attempt seems imminent, call a local crisis center, dial 911, or take the person to an emergency room. **Do not, under any circumstances, leave a suicidal person alone.**

It's also wise to remove guns, drugs, knives, and other potentially lethal objects from the vicinity. In some cases, involuntary hospitalization may be necessary to keep the person safe and prevent a suicide attempt.

Suicide prevention tip #3: Offer help and support

If a friend or family member is suicidal, the best way to help is by offering an empathetic, listening ear. Let your loved one know that he or she is not alone and that you care. Don't take responsibility, however, for making your loved one well. You can offer support, but you can't get better for a suicidal person. He or she has to make a personal commitment to recovery.

As you're helping a suicidal person, don't forget to take care of yourself. Find someone that you trust—a friend, family member, clergyman, or counselor—to talk to about your feelings and get support of your own.

Helping a suicidal person:

- Listen without judgment — Let a suicidal person express his or her feelings and accept those feelings without judging or discounting them. Don't act shocked, lecture on the value of life, or say that suicide is wrong.
- Offer hope — Reassure the person that help is available and that the suicidal feelings are temporary. Don't dismiss the pain he or she feels, but talk about the alternatives to suicide and let the person know that his or her life is important to you.
- Don't promise confidentiality — Refuse to be sworn to secrecy. A life is at stake and you may need to speak to a mental health professional in order to keep the suicidal person safe. If you promise to keep your discussions secret, you may have to break your word.
- Get professional help — Do everything in your power to get a suicidal person the help he or she needs. Call a crisis line for advice and referrals. Encourage the person to see a mental health professional, help locate a treatment facility, or take them to a doctor's appointment.
- Make a plan for life — Help the person develop a "Plan for Life," a set of steps he or she promises to follow during a suicidal crisis. It should include contact numbers for the person's doctor or therapist, as well as friends and family members who will help in an emergency.