

There is no “typical” demographic of person who is at risk for suicide. No age group, ethnicity, or background is immune. Fortunately, many troubled individuals display behaviors deliberately or inadvertently signal their suicidal intent. Recognizing the warning signs and learning what to do next may help save a life.

## **THE WARNING SIGNS**

The following behavioral patterns may indicate possible risk for suicide and should be watched closely. If they appear numerous or severe, seek professional help at once. The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255) provides access to trained telephone counselors, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

- Talking about suicide, death, and/or no reason to live
- Preoccupation with death and dying
- Withdrawal from friends and/or social activities
- Experience of a recent severe loss (especially a relationship) or the threat of a significant loss
- Experience or fear of a situation of humiliation or failure
- Drastic changes in behavior
- Loss of interest in hobbies, work, school, etc.
- Preparation for death by making out a will (unexpectedly) and final arrangements
- Giving away prized possessions
- Previous history of suicide attempts, as well as violence and/or hostility
- Unnecessary risks; reckless and/or impulsive behavior
- Loss of interest in personal appearance
- Increased use of alcohol and/or drugs
- General hopelessness
- Recent experience humiliation or failure
- Unwillingness to connect with potential helpers

## **FEELINGS, THOUGHTS, AND BEHAVIORS**

Nearly everyone at some time in his or her life thinks about suicide. Most everyone decides to live because they come to realize that the crisis is temporary, but death is not. On the other hand, people in the midst of a crisis often perceive their dilemma as inescapable and feel an utter loss of control. Frequently, they:

- Can't stop the pain
- Can't think clearly
- Can't make decisions
- Can't see any way out
- Can't sleep eat or work

- Can't get out of the depression
- Can't make the sadness go away
- Can't see the possibility of change
- Can't see themselves as worthwhile
- Can't get someone's attention
- Can't seem to get control

## WHAT DO YOU DO?

1. Be aware. Learn the warning signs.
2. Get involved. Become available. Show interest and support.
3. Ask if s/he is thinking about suicide.
4. Be direct. Talk openly and freely about suicide.
5. Be willing to listen. Allow for expressions of feelings and accept those feelings.
6. Be non-judgmental. Don't debate whether suicide is right or wrong, or feelings are good or bad. Don't lecture the value of life.
7. Don't dare him/her to do it.
8. Don't give advice by making decisions for someone else to tell them to behave differently.
9. Don't ask "why." This encourages defensiveness.
10. Offer empathy, not sympathy.
11. Don't act shocked. This creates distance.
12. Don't be sworn to secrecy. Seek support.
13. Offer hope that alternatives are available, do not offer glib reassurance; it only proves you don't understand.
14. **Take action. Remove means. Get help from individuals or agencies specializing in crisis intervention and suicide prevention.**

## WHO CAN YOU TALK TO?

- A community mental health agency
- A private therapist
- A school counselor or psychologist
- A family physician
- A suicide prevention/crisis intervention center
- A religious/spiritual leader