

Suicide Resource Guide

Suicide Warning Signs

- Talking about suicide - Any talk about suicide, dying, or self-harm, such as "I wish I hadn't been born," "If I see you again...", and "I'd be better off dead."
- Seeking out lethal means - 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.

Additional Warning Signs in Teens

- Change in eating/sleeping habits
- Withdrawal from friends, family, and regular activities
- Violent or rebellious behavior, running away
- Drug/alcohol use
- Unusual neglect of personal appearance
- Persistent boredom, difficulty concentrating, or a decline in the quality of schoolwork
- Frequent complaints about physical symptoms, often related to emotions, such as stomachaches, headaches, fatigue, etc.
- Not tolerating praise or rewards

Additional Warning Signs in Older Adults

- Reading material about death and suicide
- Disruption of sleep patterns
- Increased alcohol or prescription drug use/stockpiling medications
- Failure to take care of self or follow medical orders
- Sudden interest in firearms
- Social withdrawal or elaborate good-byes
- Rush to complete or revise a will

Risk Factors for Suicide

- Mental illness
- Alcoholism or drug abuse
- Previous suicide attempts
- Family history of suicide
- Terminal illness or chronic pain
- Recent loss or stressful life event
- Social isolation and loneliness
- History of trauma or abuse

Additional Risk Factors for Teens

- Childhood abuse
- Recent traumatic event
- Lack of a support network
- Availability of a gun
- Hostile social or school environment
- Exposure to other teen suicides

Additional Risk Factors for Older Adults

- Recent death of a loved one
- Physical illness, disability, or pain
- Isolation and loneliness
- Major life changes, such as retirement
- Loss of independence
- Loss of sense of purpose

Assess the Immediate Risk for Suicide

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 SET for doing it, and an INTENTION to do it.

Questions to assess the immediate risk for suicide:

1. Do you have a suicide plan? (PLAN)
2. Do you have what you need to carry out your plan (pills, gun, etc.)? (MEANS)
3. Do you know when you would do it? (TIME SET)
4. Do you intend to commit suicide? (INTENTION)

Levels of Suicide Risk

- **Low** - Some suicidal thoughts. No suicide plan. Says he or she won't commit suicide. Assess the risk as low if you believe the person may be thinking about suicide, but you are sure as can be that he or she has no plan to kill him or herself at this time.
- **Moderate** - Suicidal thoughts. Vague plan that isn't very lethal. Says he or she won't commit suicide. Assess the risk as moderate if you believe the person plans to attempt suicide but you are sure as you can be that he or she does not plan to attempt suicide right away.
- **High** - Suicidal thoughts. Specific plan that is highly lethal. Says he or she won't commit suicide. Has the means to do it readily at hand. This indicates the person plans to commit suicide very soon.
- **Severe** – Suicidal thoughts. Specific plan that is highly lethal. Says he or she will commit suicide. Has the means to do it readily at hand. This indicates the person plans to commit suicide very soon.

| If the risk is low: | If the risk is moderate: | If the risk is high/severe: |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get the person to agree to talk to you, a pastor, a suicide hot line, or a mental health professional. Don't leave or hang up until he or she agrees. • Contact your ministry leader and/or pastor immediately after the episode and consult about finding additional care for the person. • Be sure to check back with the person frequently. Call and make sure he or she is okay. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get the person to agree to talk to you, a pastor, a suicide hot line, or a mental health professional. Don't leave or hang up until he or she agrees. • Contact your ministry leader and/or pastor immediately after the episode and consult about finding additional care for the person. • You (or ministry leader, or pastor) may want to go with the person to their professional appt. to make sure they follow through and begin to get the help needed. Your presence will also show care during a difficult time. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not leave the person or allow him/her to hang up the phone until professional help has arrived. • Get help immediately. Call 911 and explain that you are with a person who is threatening suicide and need help getting them to a safe place. If you are on the phone with the suicidal person, get someone else to call 911 or use another phone if available. • Call a pastor or ministry leader and explain that you need someone to come immediately to where the person is and help you. • If possible, go with the person to the hospital in order to care for him/her during the stressful time of beginning to get the help needed. |