Recognizing the Signs of Suicide

Suicide can be prevented. In most cases, there are warning signs that someone is contemplating a suicide attempt. The most effective way to prevent suicide is to recognize the warning signs, take them seriously and know how to respond to them.

**The warning signs are:**

- Talking about suicide (killing one's self)
- Always talking or thinking about death
- Withdrawing from friends, family, and society
- Making comments about being hopeless, helpless, or worthless
- Feeling rage or uncontrolled anger or seeking revenge
- Saying things like "It would be better if I wasn't here" or "I want out"
- Depression (deep sadness, loss of interest, trouble sleeping and eating) that gets worse
- A sudden, unexpected switch from being very sad to being calm or appearing to be happy
- Having a "death wish," tempting fate by taking risks that could lead to death, like driving fast or through red lights
- Increasing alcohol or drug use
- Losing interest in things one used to care about
- Visiting or calling people to say good-bye
- Putting affairs in order, tying up lose ends, changing a will
- Writing/drawing about death and dying
- Suicidal types of behavior, hurting or cutting self
- Giving away prized possessions
- Seeing no reason for living or having no sense of purpose in life
- Sudden happiness following depression
- A suicide plan of how, what, where they intend to do it collecting drugs, weapons

Be especially concerned if a person is exhibiting any of these warning signs and has attempted suicide in the past. According to the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, between 20-50% of people who commit suicide have had a previous attempt.

Source: Suicide Prevention Action Network  [http://www.spanusa.org](http://www.spanusa.org)
How You Can Help

Sometimes our friends get depressed and we wonder how we can help them out. Most of the time depression can be treated, or the stress is resolved lifting the pressure from the individual. Unfortunately, low points in our friends lives often go unnoticed. One way we may be able to help is by listening to our friends and offering assistance where it is needed. We don't need to become counselors, just be there to talk and know where more help can be obtained if we need it.

First, if someone you know appears to be depressed and is contemplating suicide, take them seriously. Listen to what he or she is saying. Take the initiative to ask him or her what they are planning, but don't attempt to argue them out of committing suicide. Rather, let the person know that you care and understand and are listening. Avoid statements like: "You have so much to live for."

Seek help as soon as possible by contacting a mental health professional or by calling the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK if someone you know exhibits suicidal signs.

The ways you can help a friend or family member you are concerned about vary from situation to situation. Some things include:

- Don’t be afraid to ask your friend if they are thinking about suicide, you won’t put ideas into their head - often they will respond to your concern if you ask them to
- Encourage them to talk further and help them to find appropriate counseling assistance
- Ask if they are thinking about making a suicide attempt
- Ask if they have a plan
- Think about the 'completeness' of the plan and how dangerous it is
- Do not trivialize plans that seem less complete or dangerous, ALL intentions must be acknowledged as serious
- Encourage your friend to talk to someone who can help with their situation  Because the person probably doesn't think they can be helped, you'll probably have to be persistent by going with him.

If your loved one appears to be in danger of committing suicide imminently, do not leave him or her alone; remove any weapons or drugs that may be used. Accompany him or her to the nearest emergency room.

During treatment, support your friend. Help them to remember to take antidepressant medications and to continue any other therapy prescribed.

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