

Understanding & Helping A Suicidal Person



- Suicide does not discriminate. People of all genders, ages, and ethnicities can be at risk.
- There is no single cause for suicide. Many different factors contribute to someone making a suicide attempt.
- Suicidal thoughts or actions are a sign of extreme distress, not a harmless bid for attention, and should not be ignored.
- Asking a person if they are thinking about suicide does not increase their risk for suicide.
- Help the person connect with the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1.800.273.8255.

Suicide is a major public health concern. Over 47,000 people died by suicide in the United States in 2017; it is the 10th leading cause of death overall. Suicide is complicated and tragic, but it is often preventable. Knowing the warning signs and risk factors for suicide and how to get help can save lives.

What Are The Warning Signs For Suicide?

The behaviors listed below may be signs that someone is thinking about suicide:

- Talking about wanting to die or wanting to kill themselves
- Talking about feeling empty, hopeless, or having no reason to live
- Making a plan or looking for a way to kill themselves, such as searching for lethal methods online, stockpiling pills, or buying a gun
- Talking about great guilt or shame
- Talking about feeling trapped or feeling that there are no solutions
- Feeling unbearable pain (emotional pain or physical pain)
- Talking about being a burden to others
- Using alcohol or drugs more often
- Acting anxious or agitated
- Withdrawing from family and friends
- Changing eating and/or sleeping habits
- Taking great risks that could lead to death, such as driving extremely fast
- Talking or thinking about death often
- Displaying extreme mood swings, suddenly changing from very sad to very calm or happy
- Giving away important possessions, putting affairs in order, making a will
- Saying goodbye to friends and family

A person who recognizes these warning signs in themselves or someone they know should get help as soon as possible, particularly if the behavior is new or has increased recently.

What Are The Risk Factors For Suicide?

Suicide does not discriminate. People of all genders, ages, and ethnicities can be at risk. Suicidal behavior is complex, and there is no single cause. Many different factors contribute to someone making a suicide attempt. People most at risk tend to share specific characteristics. The main risk factors for suicide are:

- Mental health or substance use disorders
- A prior suicide attempt
- Family history of suicide
- Having guns in the home
- Certain medical conditions and/or chronic pain
- Family history of a mental disorder or substance abuse
- Family violence, including physical or sexual abuse
- Being exposed to others' suicidal behavior



Wheeler

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www.ctclearinghouse.org

A Library and Resource Center on Alcohol, Tobacco, Other Drugs, Mental Health and Wellness

Does Everyone With These Risk Factors Attempt Suicide?

Many people have some of these risk factors but do not attempt suicide. It is important to note that suicide is not a normal response to stress. **Suicidal thoughts or actions are a sign of extreme distress, not a harmless bid for attention, and should not be ignored.**

Often, family and friends are the first to recognize the warning signs of suicide and can be the first step toward helping an at-risk individual find treatment with someone who specializes in diagnosing and treating mental health conditions.

How To Help A Suicidal Person

Here are five steps a person can take to help someone in emotional pain:

- **ASK:** “Are you thinking about killing yourself?” It’s not an easy question, but studies show that asking at-risk individuals if they are suicidal does not increase suicides or suicidal thoughts.
- **KEEP THEM SAFE:** Reducing a suicidal person’s access to highly lethal items or places is an important part of suicide prevention. While this is not always easy, asking the at-risk person if they have a plan and removing or disabling the lethal means can make a difference.
- **BE THERE:** Listen carefully and learn what the individual is thinking and feeling. Research suggests acknowledging and talking about suicide may reduce rather than increase suicidal thoughts.
- **HELP THEM CONNECT:** Save the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (1-800-273-TALK (8255)) and the Crisis Text Line (741741) numbers in cell phones, so the numbers are there when a person needs them. A person can also help connect the at-risk individual with a trusted person like a family member, friend, spiritual advisor, or mental health professional.
- **STAY CONNECTED:** Staying in touch after a crisis or after being discharged from care can make a difference. Studies have shown the number of suicide deaths goes down when someone follows up with the at-risk person.

What Types Of Interventions Are Available To Help A Suicidal Person?

Brief interventions, such as **safety planning** and **follow-up phone calls** are effective helping techniques. Personalized safety planning has been shown to help reduce suicidal thoughts and actions. The at-risk person works with a caregiver to develop a plan that describes ways to limit access to lethal means such as firearms, pills, or poisons. The plan also lists coping strategies and people and resources that can help in a crisis. Also, research has shown that when at-risk individuals receive further screening, a safety plan intervention, and a series of supportive phone calls, their risk of suicide goes down.

Multiple types of **psychosocial interventions**, including Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), have been found to help individuals who have attempted suicide. These types of interventions may prevent someone from making another attempt. CBT helps individuals recognize their thought patterns and consider alternative actions when thoughts of suicide arise. DBT helps a person recognize when his or her feelings or actions are disruptive or unhealthy, and teaches the skills needed to deal better with upsetting situations.

Some individuals at risk for suicide might benefit from **medication** along with psychosocial interventions. Doctors and at-risk individuals can work together to find the best medication or medication combination, as well as the right dose.

Connecticut Resources

CT Department of Mental
Health and Addiction Services

www.preventsuicidect.org

www.ct.gov/DMHAS

24/7 Access Line

1.800.563.4086

National Resources

National Suicide Prevention
Lifeline

www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

1.800.273.TALK (8255)

Crisis Text Line

www.crisistextline.org

Text CT to 741741

