

Suicide Signs and Prevention

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If you or someone you know is having suicidal thoughts, then this article can help. Suicide can be a difficult topic to talk about. The words “secret,” “stigma,” and “taboo” come to mind when we hear it voiced. But it doesn't discriminate; individuals from every race, age, culture, class, and gender are affected by suicide.

At one time or another, every person finds life overwhelming. Some can't cope or can't find a solution to their emotions or troubles and fall into despair, seeing suicide as the only way out.

Understanding the situation

Understanding the situation of a person at risk for suicide is crucial for providing effective support and intervention. It allows you to address the specific challenges and triggers the individual is facing, enabling more targeted and compassionate assistance that can potentially save a life.

A common struggle

Suicide is more widespread than you might think—globally, 1 in 100 deaths are a result of suicide, according to the [World Health Organization](#).

While many find the topic uncomfortable to talk about, the reality is that suicide can affect anyone.

There are many reasons that can cause someone to see suicide as the only solution to their problems. And it may, at one time or another, happen to you, your family, friends, neighbours, or co-workers.

Why suicide?

Hopeless, helpless, worthless, and desperate—these are strong words to describe the intense feelings many people who've contemplated suicide experience. Whatever the trigger, suicide may seem like the only solution to an unsolvable, painful problem. A suicidal person believes no one can help them and that the problem can't be fixed.

Risk factors

Risk factors contribute to the likelihood of someone to contemplate, attempt, or complete suicide. People are at a greater risk of completing suicide if they are associated with any of these factors:

- substance use problems (alcohol or drugs)

- easy access to lethal means (e.g., firearms or unsecured prescription medication)
- serious physical illness
- major life changes
- experience of bullying
- exposure to suicidal behaviour of others
- family history of suicide or suicide attempts
- personal or family history of mental illness (e.g., depression, borderline personality disorder, schizophrenia)
- recent emotional trauma (e.g., death of a loved one, unemployment, divorce)
- previous suicide threats or attempts
- history of personal trauma or abuse
- social isolation
- stigma associated with seeking help

Warning signs

Being aware of what signs to look for is a huge step in preventing suicide. The person you are concerned about may exhibit multiple signs or just one. Any indication should prompt you to get help immediately. Common warning signs include:

- a sudden and unexpected change in someone suffering from anxiety or depression to an unusually cheerful attitude
- behaviour that is out of character—e.g., someone who is normally careful acting recklessly
- dramatic mood changes
- giving away prized possessions to friends and family; making a will; taking out insurance or other preparations for death
- increased alcohol and/or drug use
- making comments about being hopeless, helpless, or worthless
- making remarks related to death and dying or suicide, even in a joking manner
- repeated expressions of hopelessness, helplessness, worthlessness, or desperation
- symptoms of depression—sleeplessness, social withdrawal, loss of appetite, loss of interest in activity
- talking about feeling trapped or being a burden to others
- tension, anxiety, nervousness, impulsiveness
- withdrawal from friends, family, and community

A signal for help

Many people who consider or plan for suicide may not want to die but lack the ability to ask for help. They may simply see it as the only solution to end their pain and suffering. **Take action by seeking support immediately.**

Remember: if someone you know is considering suicide or has already created a suicide plan and you sense it's an emergency, act immediately and call 9-1-1.

How to help

Watching someone in emotional pain is never easy, especially when it's a loved one you care deeply about. While it may be instinctive to try and minimize or downplay the signs of a loved one contemplating suicide (most likely because you don't want to think the unthinkable), your involvement can play a critical role in suicide prevention.

Remember: if someone you know is considering suicide or has already created a suicide plan and you sense it's an emergency situation, act immediately and call 9-1-1.

If you're concerned about the possibility but are unsure about your loved one's state of mind, break down the walls of silence and:

Offer support. Warning signs or talk of suicide are a distress signal. Find a safe, private place to voice your concerns, speak to your loved one, and better assess the situation.

Be direct. Don't be afraid to talk about suicide. Contrary to popular belief, talking directly about suicidal thoughts can help your loved one. Talk openly about feelings and concerns, and never make a promise to keep it a secret. Instead, promise to assist your loved one in getting help. Ask if they have a suicide plan. It's important to find out this information to pass on to a professional.

Listen. Be a non-judgmental voice. Don't tell your loved one not to think about suicide or minimize problems. Lend a caring ear. Give as much time as needed to talk, and let your loved one know you're there to offer support.

Take protective steps. Your loved one shouldn't be alone for the next few days or weeks; however, this should be in conjunction with professional mental health support. Ask who else they feel comfortable accepting help from.

Remove all dangers. Any prescription and non-prescription drugs, medication, or firearms should be removed from your loved one's home, and there shouldn't be access to any dangerous items. You need to involve a mental health professional if you are in this situation. You can either call the person's primary care provider or emergency services.

If you suspect someone you know is considering suicide, act quickly to get them professional support. Or if you find yourself contemplating it, contact a counsellor, medical professional, or the [9-8-8 Suicide Crisis Helpline](#) by dialling 9-8-8 immediately.

If you have suicidal thoughts

If you find suicidal thoughts entering your inner dialogue, discuss these thoughts with a person you trust—be it a loved one or a medical professional. By getting help as soon as the warning signs appear, suicide, in many cases, can be prevented.

If you are having suicidal thoughts, you may feel that no one can help. But the best thing you can do is speak to someone. It's less of a risk to open up than it is to take your life.

Pick someone you trust and feel comfortable with, such as a counsellor, doctor, suicide hotline distress counsellor, family member, friend, religious leader, or other health professional. You can overcome this feeling of desperation and regain your life by:

- calling a counsellor or a crisis support line
- promising yourself not to make any rash or spur-of-the-moment decisions
- seeing your family doctor who can refer you to counselling services
- seeking out a mental health professional
- speaking to people who have been suicidal and recovered
- talking to family and friends
- visiting your nearest emergency room at the hospital if you feel you need immediate help

Looking to the future

People who are or have been suicidal have many options to help them regain their mental and physical health. These include:

Professional support:

- counselling services
- medical assistance
- psychiatric medication management
- visits from mental health professionals
- outpatient clinics

Education and skill-building:

- information on depression, mental illness, and stress
- coping strategies training
- mindfulness and grounding exercises

Support systems:

- encouragement from family and friends
- support groups
- peer support programs

Treatment settings:

- inpatient care
- outpatient services

Self-care practices:

- physical exercise
- proper nutrition
- adequate sleep
- daily self-care routines

Safety measures:

- crisis planning and safety protocols

Remember, if you or a loved one are having feelings or thoughts of suicide, you're not alone. There are many people who have considered or attempted to take their lives and made a full recovery.

For those in the depths of despair, suicide may seem like the only escape. But it is never the right answer. Whether you or a loved one are contemplating suicide, help is always there. Regardless of the path taken on the road to recovery, seeking professional support and talking honestly and openly about thoughts and emotions will help to break down the barriers suicide can build. And once the walls are down, it's easier to see that there is light beyond even the darkest of days.

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