

MIMIND TOOLS

Understanding and Helping Someone Who is Suicidal

Be Aware of the Warning Signs of Suicide

There is no "typical" suicide victim. It happens to young and old, rich and poor. Fortunately, there are some common warning signs which, when acted upon, can save lives. Here are some signs to look for:

A person might be suicidal if they exhibit the following behaviors:

- Talks about committing suicide
- Has trouble eating or sleeping
- Experiences drastic changes in behavior
- Withdraws from friends and/or social activities or loses interest in hobbies, work, school, etc.
- Prepares for death by making out a will and final arrangements
- Gives away prized possessions
- Has attempted suicide before
- Takes unnecessary risks
- Has had recent severe losses
- Is preoccupied with death and dying
- Loses interest in their personal appearance
- Increases their use of alcohol or drugs

What to do

Here are some ways to be helpful to someone who is threatening suicide:

- Be direct. Talk openly and matter-of-factly about suicide. Show interest and support.
- Be willing to listen. Allow expressions of feelings. Accept the feelings.
- Be non-judgmental. Don't debate whether suicide is right or wrong, or feelings are good or bad.
- Don't lecture on the value of life.
- Don't dare him or her to do it.
- Don't act shocked. This will put distance between you.
- Don't be sworn to secrecy. Seek support.
- Offer hope that alternatives are available but do not offer glib reassurance.
- There is no research to indicate whether it is safe to return firearms to the home after removal.

Be aware of feelings

Many people at some time in their lives think about committing suicide. Most decide to live, because they eventually come to realize that the crisis is temporary and death is permanent. On other hand, people having a crisis sometimes perceive their dilemma as inescapable and feel an utter loss of control. These are some of the feelings and things they experience:

- 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 depression
- Can't make the sadness go away
- Can't see a future without pain
- Can't see themselves as worthwhile
- Can't get someone's attention
- Can't seem to get control

How to partner with the patient's treatment team

- Help monitor symptoms such as depressed mood, suicidal thoughts, ability to sleep and eat, drug and alcohol use.
- Encourage the person to educate themselves about their illness through the use of books and websites.
- Promote the use of community support groups.
- Encourage and monitor adherence to treatment including taking medication as prescribed and keeping therapy appointments.

If the patient feels suicidal

- Immediately contact the person's doctor or therapist
- Call the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline: 988, a suicide prevention or crisis center.
- Call 911
- Take the person to the local emergency room