



AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF SUICIDOLOGY

## Understanding and Helping the Suicidal Individual

### BE AWARE OF THE WARNING SIGNS

**Are you or someone you love at risk of suicide? Get the facts and take appropriate action. Get help immediately by contacting a mental health professional or calling 1-800-273-8255 for a referral should you witness, hear, or see anyone exhibiting any one or more of the following:**

- Someone threatening to hurt or kill him/herself, or talking of wanting to hurt or kill him/herself.
- Someone looking for ways to kill him/herself by seeking access to firearms, available pills, or other means.
- Someone talking or writing about death, dying or suicide, when these actions are out of the ordinary for the person.

**Seek help as soon as possible by contacting a mental health professional or calling 1-800-273-8255 for a referral should you witness, hear, or see anyone exhibiting any one or more of the following:**

- Hopelessness
- Rage, uncontrolled anger, seeking revenge
- Acting reckless or engaging in risky activities, seemingly without thinking
- Feeling trapped – like there's no way out
- Increased alcohol or drug use
- Withdrawing from friends, family and society
- Anxiety, agitation, unable to sleep or sleeping all the time
- Dramatic mood changes
- No reason for living; no sense of purpose in life

### BE AWARE OF THE FACTS

1. Suicide is preventable. Most suicidal individuals desperately want to live; they are just unable to see alternatives to their problems.
2. Most suicidal individuals give definite warnings of their suicidal intentions, but others are either unaware of the significance of these warnings or do not know how to respond to them.
3. Talking about suicide does not cause someone to be suicidal.
4. Approximately 32,000 Americans kill themselves every year. The number of suicide attempts is much greater and often results in serious injury.
5. Suicide is the third leading cause of death among young people ages 15-24, and it is the eighth leading cause of death among all persons.
6. Youth (15-24) suicide rates increased more than 200% from the 1950's to the late 1970's. Following the late 1970's, the rates for youth suicide have remained stable.

7. The suicide rate is higher among the elderly (over 65) than any other age group.
8. Four times as many men kill themselves as compared to women, yet three times as many women attempt suicide as compared to men.
9. Suicide occurs across all age, economic, social, and ethnic boundaries.
10. Firearms are currently the most utilized method of suicide by essentially all groups (male, female, young, old, white, non-white).
11. Surviving family members not only suffer the trauma of losing a loved one to suicide, and may themselves be at higher risk for suicide and emotional problems.

### **WAYS TO BE HELPFUL TO SOMEONE WHO IS THREATENING SUICIDE**

1. Be aware. Learn the warning signs.
2. Get involved. Become available. Show interest and support.
3. Ask if he/she is thinking about suicide.
4. Be direct. Talk openly and freely about suicide.
5. Be willing to listen. Allow for expression of feelings. Accept the feelings.
6. 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.
7. Don't dare him/her to do it.
8. Don't give advice by making decisions for someone else to tell them to behave differently.
9. Don't ask 'why'. This encourages defensiveness.
10. Offer empathy, not sympathy.
11. Don't act shocked. This creates distance.
12. Don't be sworn to secrecy. Seek support.
13. Offer hope that alternatives are available, do not offer glib reassurance; it only proves you don't understand.
14. Take action! Remove means! Get help from individuals or agencies specializing in crisis intervention and suicide prevention.

### **BE AWARE OF FEELINGS, THOUGHTS, AND BEHAVIORS**

Nearly everyone at some time in his or her life thinks about suicide. Most everyone decides to live because they come to realize that the crisis is temporary, but death is not. On the other hand, people in the midst of a crisis often perceive their dilemma as inescapable and feel an utter loss of control. Frequently, they:

- 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 the depression
- Can't make the sadness of away
- Can't see the possibility of change
- Can't see themselves as worthwhile
- Can't get someone's attention
- Can't see to get control

## **TALK TO SOMEONE – YOU ARE NOT ALONE**

### **CONTACT:**

- A community mental health agency
- A school counselor or psychologist
- A suicide prevention/crisis intervention center
- A private therapist
- A family physician
- A religious/spiritual leader

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