

# Helping Someone Who Is Suicidal

Suicide is the act of ending (*taking*) one's own life. Someone who is thinking about suicide needs immediate help. Even if you do not know what to say or do to help, you can start by letting the person know that you care. Listen to him or her. Then talk about how to get help. Help is available through suicide hotlines, therapy, and other treatments.

## What are signs that someone is suicidal?

Common signs include:

- Signs of depression, such as:
  - Tearfulness or sadness.
  - Irritability or rage.
  - Problems with eating or sleeping.
  - Feeling guilty or worthless.
  - Loss of interest in things that a person used to enjoy.
  - Feelings of hopelessness or helplessness.
  - Recurrent thoughts of death or suicide.
- Changes in social behaviors and relationships, including:
  - Isolating oneself.
  - Withdrawing from friends and family.
  - Giving away possessions.
  - Saying goodbye.
  - Acting aggressively.
  - Sleeping more or less than usual.
  - Having trouble managing school or work.
  - Talking about feeling hopeless or being a burden.
  - Engaging in risky behaviors, such as drinking more alcohol or using more drugs.

## What are the risk factors for suicide?

Risk factors for suicide include:

- Having a friend or family member who has died by suicide.
- A history of attempted suicide.
- Depression or other mental health problems.
- Being exposed to graphic stories of suicide in the media.
- Alcohol or drug abuse, especially when combined with a mental illness.
- A serious physical problem, such as chronic pain.
- A stressful life event, now or in the past, such as:
  - Divorce or social rejection.
  - Childhood abuse or neglect.
  - Sudden life changes, such as financial crisis or going to jail.

## What should I do if someone is suicidal?

If you think someone may be suicidal:

- Ask him or her directly: "Are you thinking about suicide or hurting yourself?" Asking that question does not make someone more likely to make a suicide attempt.
- Avoid giving advice or arguing with the person about the value of his or her life.



If a person confides in you that he or she is considering suicide:

- Take the person seriously. **Never** ignore comments about suicide.
- Listen to the person's thoughts and concerns with compassion.
- Let the person know that you will stay with him or her.
- Offer to help the person get to a doctor or mental health professional.
- Remove all weapons and medicines from the person's living area.
- **Do not** promise to keep his or her thoughts of suicide a secret.
- Call a suicide crisis helpline, such as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255 or text TALK to 741741.

### Get help right away if:

**You believe that a person is in immediate danger of hurting himself or herself, or may have thoughts of taking his or her own life. You can:**

- **Call a crisis center or a local suicide prevention center. These are often located at hospitals, clinics, community service organizations, social service providers, or health departments.**
- **Call a suicide crisis helpline, such as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255, or text TALK to 741741. This is open 24 hours a day.**
- **Take the person to the nearest emergency department.**
- **Call your local emergency services (911 in the U.S.).**

### Summary

- Suicide is the act of ending (*taking*) one's own life.
- Suicide can be prevented by knowing the signs and taking action.
- If you know someone who is showing risk factors for suicide, ask if he or she is thinking about hurting himself or herself. Take all concerns about suicide seriously, and get support from experts in mental illness or suicide.
- If you believe that a person is in immediate danger of hurting himself or herself, or may have thoughts of taking his or her own life, get help right away by calling a crisis center, a suicide helpline, or 911 (in the U.S.). You can also take the person to the nearest emergency department.

This information is not intended to replace advice given to you by your health care provider. Make sure you discuss any questions you have with your health care provider.