



SUSAN FLETCHER, PH.D.
PSYCHOLOGIST • AUTHOR • FORENSICS

Suicide: Understanding and Helping

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 warning signs 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. Four times as many men kill themselves as compared to women, yet three times as many women attempt suicide as compared to men.
7. Suicide occurs across all ages, economic, social, and ethnic boundaries.
8. Firearms are currently the most utilized method of suicide by essentially all groups.
9. Surviving family members not only suffer the trauma of losing a loved one to suicide but themselves are at a higher risk for suicide and emotional problems.

The Warning Signs

1. Threatening to hurt or kill him/herself, or talking of wanting to hurt or kill him/herself.
2. Looking for ways to kill him/herself.
3. Talking or writing about death, dying or suicide, when these actions are out of the ordinary for the person.
4. Increased substance use (alcohol and/or drug).
5. No reason for living; no sense of purpose in life.
6. Anxiety, agitation, unable to sleep or sleeping all the time.
7. Feeling trapped – like there is no way out.
8. Hopelessness.
9. Withdrawing from family, friends, and society.
10. Rage, uncontrolled anger, seeking revenge.
11. Acting reckless or engaging in risky activities, seemingly without thinking.
12. Dramatic mood changes.

How to be Helpful

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. Be direct. Talk openly and freely about suicide.
4. Be willing to listen. Allow for expression of feelings. Accept the feelings.
5. 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.
6. Don't dare him/her to do it.
7. Don't give advice by making decisions for him/her or telling him/her to behave differently.
8. Don't ask 'why.' This encourages defensiveness. Offer empathy, not sympathy.
9. Don't act shocked. This creates distance.
10. Don't be sworn to secrecy. Seek support.
11. Offer hope that alternatives are available, do not offer glib reassurance; it only proves you don't understand.
12. Take action!!! Remove means! Get help from individuals or agencies specializing in crisis intervention and suicide prevention.

Who to Call

1. If you or someone you know is in immediate danger call **911**.
2. Contact a free and confidential 24-hour crisis intervention service **(214) 828-1000** or **1-800-273-8255**

Prepared with information provided by the American Association of Suicidology (www.suicidology.org)