

SUICIDE PREVENTION

Suicide is one of the most devastating outcomes of serious mental illness (SMI).

Unfortunately, deaths by suicide have become more common in recent years. The overall suicide rate in the U.S. has increased by 31% since 2001. It is the 2nd leading cause of death among people aged 10-34 and the 10th leading cause of death overall.

Although there is no way to know what someone is thinking, there are often warning signs for suicidal thoughts and potential attempts. The keys to suicide prevention are to recognize the signs when they are present and then act quickly when you see them. This helps keep your loved ones safe.



You need to intervene immediately if your loved one starts talking about:

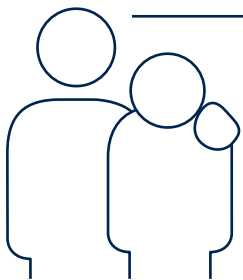
- ! Being a burden to others
- ! Experiencing unbearable pain
- ! Feeling trapped
- ! Having no reason to live



Other warning signs, like these listed below, can be more subtle:

- ! Giving away prized possessions
- ! Increased use of alcohol or drugs
- ! Isolating from family and friends
- ! Increased anxiety, guilt or shame
- ! Sleeping too much or too little

The presence of any or all of these signs does not mean that a loved one is definitely going to attempt suicide. What these signs do mean is that your loved one is struggling and that it is time to act.



If you talk about suicide with a loved one, make sure that you help them feel heard and validated.

- Adopt an open and compassionate mindset when you talk. Instead of “arguing” or trying to disprove any negative statements they make (“Your life isn’t that bad!”), try active listening techniques. Ask them to reflect on their feelings or summarize their thoughts.
- Give them an opportunity to express thoughts and feelings about something they may have kept secret. Discussion brings it into the open and provides a chance to intervene.

HOW TO TALK ABOUT SUICIDE



If you worry that a loved one may hurt themselves, ask them directly. It is understandable to be nervous about doing that. Yet there is no research or evidence that shows talking to people about suicide increases their risk of suicidal ideation or behavior. Plus, it is not likely they will come to you to talk about it.

Here are some questions you can ask to find out if a loved one is seriously considering suicide. Some of the answers to these questions may be upsetting. However, it is important to reserve judgment so you can continue to get candid answers.

[Note: These questions are not meant to formally evaluate a loved one's safety in the same way a mental health professional would be able to.]

- ✓ Have you been feeling sad or unhappy?
- ✓ Do you ever feel hopeless? Does it seem as if things can never get better?
- ✓ Do you have any urge to hurt yourself, or desire to stop living?
- ✓ Is there anything that would hold you back, such as the effect on a pet or someone in your family, or your religious convictions?
- ✓ Would you be willing to talk to someone or ask for help if you felt desperate? Whom would you talk to?

Make sure you take some sort of action after this conversation. Depending on your loved one's answers, you may simply stay by their side for a few more hours and continue to talk about their low mood. Or, you may need to help them contact a crisis line.

- ✓ National Suicide Lifeline: 800-273-TALK (8255)
- ✓ Veterans Crisis Line: 800-273-8255
- ✓ Crisis Text Line: text NAMI to 741-741

If your loved one has a deep desire to die and a plan or method for suicide, you must bring them to the nearest Emergency Room or call 911.

When you invest time in this life-saving conversation, you can help a person who is struggling know they are seen, they are cared for, and they matter. There are many reasons why individuals who live with serious mental illness do not feel comfortable disclosing their suicidal thoughts. Yet there are no good reasons why we should not reach out anyway.

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