

Suicide Prevention: Making the Connection

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The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention writes, "Every 18 minutes someone in the U.S. dies by suicide and every 19 minutes someone is left to make sense of it." When it comes to understanding suicide or thoughts of suicide, there are no easy answers because it is so complex. Suicide is actually not about death but rather about wanting to stop the pain. Individuals who are suicidal often feel alone and feel as if there is no hope.

The vast majority of the time, those who are thinking about suicide do give verbal and/ or behavioral warning signs particularly in the last week before the attempt. By knowing the warning signs, we can help and provide support. Verbal warning signs* may be active statements or passive statements such as:

- "Things will never get better."
- "I am tired of being a burden."
- "People are better off without me."
- "No one would miss me if I were gone."
- "I wish I was dead."
- "I wish I would never wake up."
- "There is no hope."

Some of the behavioral warnings signs* are:

- Giving away prized possessions
- Getting affairs in order
- Drastic changes in behavior
- Unusual visiting or calling of people one cares about
- Preoccupation with death and dying
- Withdrawing from friends and family
- Losing interest in hobbies
- Extreme personality changes
- Difficulty sleeping
- Drastic changes in weight
- Anxiety or panic attacks
- Taking unnecessary risks
- Cannot think about the future
- Is unwilling to connect with others

It should be noted that when a previously suicidal person, exhibits a sudden, happy mood following a long period of depression, this is often a sign that he/she has made the decision to end their life. This sudden change in behavior should be thought of as a red flag warning sign.

When you are concerned about the possibility of suicide with a loved one, experts recommend asking questions. Not mentioning suicide to someone who is upset or depressed because it will plant the idea in their mind is a myth. Many depressed people have already considered suicide as an option. It is often a relief to someone thinking of suicide to know that someone has noticed their pain. Dr. Paul Quinnett author of Question Persuade Refer recommends asking questions such as:

- “Have you been unhappy lately?”
- “Have you been very unhappy lately?”
- “When was the last time you were depressed?”
- “Have you ever been so unhappy that you wished you would never wake up?”
- “When was the last time you were suicidal?”
- “You know when people are as upset as you seem, sometimes they wish they were dead. I’m wondering if you are feeling that way too.”
- “Are you thinking about suicide?”

The importance of connecting with your loved one by listening and being supportive cannot be underestimated. If your loved one is suicidal **DO NOT leave them alone**. Seek out professional help.

*Author’s note: List is not exhaustive.

Sources: www.afsp.org
www.communityforhope.org
Popular Suicide Myths by Kevin Caruso, www.suicide.org
QPR Ask a Question, Save a Life by Paul Quinnett Ph.D.
www.qprinstitute.org
www.samaritanshope.org
www.TerryWise.com

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