



youth service bureau

Suicide Prevention: We All Play a Role

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September is Suicide Prevention Month and a great time to review the risk factors for suicide and what we can all do to help. While having a mental illness (such as depression or anxiety) can be a risk factor for death by suicide, suicides typically happen in moments of crisis. A suicide attempt is often an impulsive decision that young people turn to when they feel a breakdown in their ability to deal with their stress, mood, or perceived hopelessness.

According to the World Health Organization, over 800,000 people die due to suicide every year, and is the second leading cause of death among 15-29-year-olds. Fortunately, all of us can play a role in preventing suicide. Here are some things we can do to help prevent suicide and offer hope and support to those suffering:

1. Be proactive.

There are many ways to be proactive in suicide prevention...don't wait to offer support until a young person tells you they are contemplating suicide! Here are some tips:

- Help people recognize when they need support, or when their concerns and stresses are more than what they can handle alone
- Promote social connectedness and support by helping young people connect to positive peer groups
- Help young people develop skills in problem-solving, conflict resolution, and handling problems in a non-violent way
- Build protective factors, such as identifying positive role models and being involved in school or community groups
- Identify and model healthy ways to manage stress

2. Know the warning signs.

The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention lists three main warning signs to take note of: **changes in talk, behavior, and mood**. The reality is that some people never show the "typical" signs, and suicides can still happen with NO warning signs, but here are some of the red flags:

Is the young person talking about being a burden to others, being in unbearable pain, having no reason to live, or wanting to kill themselves? Are they acting recklessly, withdrawing or isolating themselves, visiting people to say goodbye, or giving away prized possessions? Are they showing signs of depression, anxiety, irritability, or rage? Do they have a loss of interest in their life and activities? Are they preoccupied with death?

3. Stay connected.

If someone you know is exhibiting any warning signs, stay connected with them. You can say something like, “I’ve been concerned about you lately” or “I wanted to check in because you haven’t seemed yourself lately.” Ask them questions about what they are feeling (and remember – raising the topic of suicide does NOT lead to suicide.) Be willing to listen and allow them to express their feelings.

As you’re talking with someone contemplating suicide, always take his or her words seriously. People contemplating suicide often feel as though their pain is inescapable and that they have a complete loss of control. They may be too overwhelmed with pain to realize that crisis is temporary, but death is permanent. Be aware that they may truly feel as though death is the only option, and that simply offering alternatives isn’t going to be enough to help them.

Most importantly, let them know you cannot keep this a secret, but offer your support in getting them help.

4. Get help.

If someone tells you they are thinking about suicide, or you have reason to suspect they are thinking about it, get help immediately. Contact a crisis line or a mental health facility with them and stay with them until they receive the help needed.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255

Canvas Health 24-hour Crisis Connection: 612-379-6363

The Bridge for Youth Crisis Line: Text 612-400-SAFE / Call 612-377-8800

Resources

Visit these other websites for additional resources and information:

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention: <https://afsp.org/>

International Association for Suicide Prevention: <https://www.iasp.info/>

World Health Organization: <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs398/en/>

Suicide Prevention Resource Center: <http://www.sprc.org/>

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: <http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>

Help Guide to Suicide Prevention: <http://www.helpguide.org/articles/suicide-prevention/suicide-prevention-helping-someone-who-is-suicidal.htm>