

Suicide – Is Someone You Know At Risk?

Are you worried about a friend or loved one?

Did you know that ...

70% of people who commit suicide tell someone about it in advance. Sometimes those contemplating suicide talk as if they are saying goodbye or going away forever. One study observed that nearly 50% of suicide victims had a positive blood alcohol level. Between 20 and 40 percent of people who kill themselves have previously attempted suicide. Those who have made serious suicide attempts are at much higher risk for actually taking their lives. Although most depressed people are not suicidal, most suicidal people are depressed. Serious depression can be manifested in obvious sadness, but often is expressed instead as a loss of pleasure or withdrawal from activities that were once enjoyable.

Answer the following questions for the person whom you are concerned about.

Part I Suicide Risk Questionnaire

Have you heard:

- I feel there is no way out
- I'd be better off dead
- Life isn't worth living
- You'll be sorry when I'm gone
- I won't be around to deal with that
- My family would be better off without me
- Next time I'll take enough pills to do the job right
- Take my (prized collection, valuables) – I don't need this stuff anymore
- I just can't deal with everything—life's too hard
- Nobody understands me—nobody feels the way I do
- I won't be in your way much longer
- There's nothing I can do to make it better

Have you observed:

- Getting affairs in order (paying off debts, changing a will)
- Giving away articles of either personal or monetary value
- Signs of planning a suicide such as obtaining a weapon or writing a suicide note

Part II Depression Risk Questionnaire

Have you noticed the following signs of depression:

- Depressed mood
- Change in weight or appetite
- Feelings of worthlessness, self-reproach, or guilt

- Change in sleeping patterns (too much/little, disturbances)
- Thoughts of death, suicide, or wishes to be dead
- Speaking and/or moving with unusual speed or slowness
- Loss of interest or pleasure in usual activities
- Withdrawal from family and friends
- Fatigue or loss of energy
- Diminished ability to think or concentrate, slowed thinking or indecisiveness

If depression seems possible, have you also noticed:

- Extreme anxiety, agitation, or enraged behavior
- Excessive drug and/or alcohol use or abuse
- Neglect of physical health
- Feelings of hopelessness or desperation

Questionnaire interpretation

If you checked any of:

Part I only, your friend or family member may be at risk for suicide and should seek professional help immediately.

Part II only, your friend may be suffering from depression and should seek further evaluation with a mental health professional or his or her primary care physician.

Parts I and II, the suicide risk is even higher. **Strongly encourage your friend to seek professional help immediately.**

What to do if you suspect a friend or loved one is suicidal

- Do take it seriously.** 70% of all people who commit suicide give some warning of their intentions to a friend or member of their family.
- Do be willing to listen.** Even if professional help is needed, your friend or loved one will be more willing to seek help if you have listened to him or her.
- Do voice your concern.** Take the initiative to ask what is troubling your friend or loved one, and attempt to overcome any reluctance on their part to talk about it.
- Do let the person know you care and understand.** Reassure your friend or loved one that he or she is not alone. Explain that, although powerful, suicidal feelings are temporary, depression can be treated and problems can be solved.
- Do ask if the person has a specific plan** for committing suicide, and how far he or she has gone in carrying it out. (*Note: asking about suicide does not cause a person to think about—or commit—suicide. This is a myth.*)

- ☒ **Do get professional help immediately.** Bring your friend to a local hospital emergency room or crisis center (if your friend is already in treatment, contact his or her clinician). Your friend will be more likely to seek help if you accompany him or her. If all else fails, notify your community police, who are trained to handle situations like this.
- ☒ **Do follow up on treatment.** Take an active role in following up with the treatment process and medications. Be sure to notify the physician about any unexpected side effects or changes in behavior.
- ☒ **If for any reason you are unsure, uncomfortable, or unable to take action,** find a responsible adult with whom to share your concerns or contact your local police. It is better to have an angry friend than a dead one.
- ☒ **Whatever you choose to do,** the important thing is to *make the effort*.
 - Don't* assume the situation will take care of itself.
 - Don't* leave the person alone.
 - Don't* be sworn to secrecy.
 - Don't* act shocked or surprised at what the person says.
 - Don't* challenge or dare.
 - Don't* argue or debate moral issues.

If you are in a suicidal crisis call 911 and ask for help. Tell them you are in suicidal danger.

The National Suicidal Hotline is also available 24 hours 7 days a week at **1-800-784-2433** (for TTY please call **1-800-448-1833**).

Employee Service Program professional counselors are available for confidential assistance to state employees and their families, free of charge, and can be contacted at 517-373-7630, 313-456-4020 or 1-800-521-1377, Monday through Friday 8:00am – 5:00pm. For more information, visit the ESP web page at www.michigan.gov/esp.

This article has been adapted with permission from National Screening for Mental Health, Inc.