

Suicide Prevention & Warning Signs

Suicide prevention efforts seek to:

- Reduce factors that increase the risk for suicidal thoughts and behaviors
- Increase the factors that help strengthen, support, and protect individuals from suicide

Ideally, these efforts address individual, relationship, community, and societal factors while promoting hope, easing access into effective treatment, encouraging connectedness, and supporting recovery.

The causes of suicide are complex and determined by multiple combinations of factors, such as mental illness, substance abuse, painful losses, exposure to violence, and social isolation.

Warning signs that *may* mean someone is at risk include:

- Talking about wanting to die or kill oneself
- Looking for a way to kill oneself
- Talking about feeling hopeless or having no reason to live
- Talking about feeling trapped or being in unbearable pain
- Talking about being a burden to others
- Increasing the use of alcohol or drugs
- Acting anxious or agitated; behaving recklessly
- Sleeping too little or too much
- Withdrawing or feeling isolated
- Showing rage or talking about seeking revenge
- Displaying extreme mood swings

The risk is greater if the behavior is new, or has increased, and if it seems related to a painful event, loss, or change

U.S. Department of Health & Human Services,
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)
<https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/suicide-prevention>

How School Employees Can be Supportive and Responsive

If you believe warning signs are present or someone may be thinking about suicide:

- Listen without judging and show you care
- Stay with the person (or make sure the person is in a private, secure place with another caring person) until you can get further help
- Contact your School Suicide Prevention Team OR school counselor, social worker, or psychologist

“Suicide risk assessment is the process of determining an individual’s level of risk. Such an assessment should only be performed by a mental health professional who is trained to work with youth and is critical to developing an individualized plan for ensuring the safety of the student and providing support and treatment” (p.30)

Illinois State Board of Education, Illinois Youth Suicide Prevention Toolkit
<https://www.isbe.net/Documents/Suicide-Prevention-Procedures.pdf>

What to Say if You Suspect a Mental Health Crisis

Sometimes starting the conversation is the hardest part. Try some of these tips below to build a connection with someone who may be considering suicide or is exhibiting warning signs.

Do Say	Do Not Say
Thanks for opening up to me	It could be worse
Is there anything I can do to help?	Just deal with it
How can I help?	Snap out of it
Thanks for sharing	Everyone feels that way sometimes
I am sorry to hear that. It must be tough	You may have brought this on yourself
I am here for you when you need me	We have all been there
People do get better	You have got to pull yourself together
Oh man, that stinks	Maybe try thinking happier thoughts
Can I drive you to/help you find an appointment?	You will get over it soon
How are you feeling today?	At least it is not as bad as last time
I love/care about/appreciate/want the best for you	Oh...you poor thing
It is okay to talk about how your feel	It is not so terrible, stop crying
This situation sounds so stressful	That is no big deal
I hear you saying...is that right?	I cannot believe you are mad about that
You are not alone	It is not so bad, did you try...?
I believe you; this is how you feel	Just get some sleep, you will feel better
I am so glad you told me	I cannot believe you did that
I want to understand	I get it, you are sad
Please tell me what is going on	What is your problem?
Can you tell me more about...?	
I will help you through this	

HealthPartners Inc., Make It OK

<https://makeitok.org/what-to-say/>

BoysTown, Your Life Your Voice

<https://www.yourlifeyourvoice.org/journalpages/building-connection.pdf>