

Pain Isn't Always Obvious: How to Recognize the Warning Signs of Suicide and Take Action to Help a Loved One

Someone you care about—a friend, family member, or co-worker—may be struggling with thoughts of suicide, perhaps without you realizing it. It may be difficult for this person to talk about the emotional pain they are experiencing, the thoughts they are having, and the need for help. You might want to ask about suicide but are worried about introducing or even encouraging the idea. It is important to know that talking about suicide does NOT put the idea in someone's head. In fact, addressing the topic of suicide directly often provides relief and may reduce the risk of them acting on suicidal feelings.

By taking action to help a loved one—recognizing the warning signs, finding the words to start a conversation with someone you are concerned about, and reaching out for support—you have the power to make a difference, to help someone find their reasons for living.

How To Recognize The Warning Signs Of Suicide

The warning signs of suicide aren't always obvious, but most suicidal people show some signs that they are thinking about suicide. The signs may appear in conversations, through their actions, or in social media posts. Knowing what to look for is the first step toward being there for a friend or family member in need.

If you observe one or more of these warning signs, especially if the behavior is new, has increased, or seems related to a painful event, loss, or change, **take action, step in, and speak up:**

- Talking about death or suicide
- Seeking methods for self-harm, such as searching online or obtaining a gun
- Talking about feeling hopeless, desperate, trapped, or having no reason to live
- Talking about being a burden to others
- Giving away possessions
- Putting affairs in order
- Reckless behavior
- Uncontrolled anger
- Increased drug or alcohol use
- Withdrawal
- Anxiety or agitation
- Changes in sleep
- Sudden mood changes
- No sense of purpose

If you sense something is wrong, trust your instincts. If you think a person is having thoughts of suicide, don't leave them alone. If any of these signs are present, have a conversation and/or **call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255.**

TAKE ACTION: START A CONVERSATION



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“Are you thinking about suicide?”

Few questions are as difficult to ask someone we care about. But when it comes to suicide prevention, none are more important. If you are concerned about someone, don't hesitate. Here are some ways to get the conversation started.

- Prioritize finding a time for the conversation when you won't be in a hurry and can spend time with the person...don't wait.
- Mention the signs that prompted you to ask about suicide. For example, “I've noticed that you've mentioned feeling hopeless a lot lately...how are you coping with what's happening in your life?”
- Ask directly about suicide. Talking about suicide does NOT put the idea in someone's head and usually they are relieved. For example, “Sometimes when people feel like that, they are thinking about suicide. Are you thinking about suicide?”
- Listen to the reasons the person has for both living and dying. Validate that they are considering both options and underscore that living is an option for them.
- Express care and concern. Letting the person know that you take their situation seriously and that you are genuinely concerned about them will go a long way in your efforts to support them. For example, “I'm deeply concerned about you and I want you to know that help is available to get you through this. I've gathered some resources that we can start with?”
- Ask the person if they have thought about how they would attempt suicide or if they have access to any lethal means (weapons, medications, etc) and help remove those from the vicinity. (Another friend, family member or law enforcement agent may be needed to assist with this.)
- Get a verbal commitment that the person will not act upon thoughts of suicide until they have met with a professional. For example, “Please promise me that you will not harm yourself or act on any thoughts of suicide until you meet with a professional.”
- Let the person know you care and that you are there for them.

TAKE ACTION

GET SUPPORT

You are not alone. The person you are concerned about is not alone. Help is available. To find local resources, visit www.suicideispreventable.org.

If you are in crisis or concerned about someone, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255) or visit www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/chat to use the Lifeline Chat. Trained counselors are available 24/7 to offer support.



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