



UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

New York Harbor Healthcare System

**UNDERSTANDING AND HELPING THE SUICIDAL INDIVIDUAL
BE AWARE OF THE WARNING SIGNS**

Are you or someone you love at risk of suicide? Get the facts and take appropriate action. Get help immediately by contacting a mental health professional or calling 1-800-273-8255 for a referral should you witness, hear, or see anyone exhibiting any one or more of the following:

- Someone threatening to hurt or kill him/herself, or talking of wanting to hurt or kill him/herself.
- Someone looking for ways to kill him/herself by seeking access to firearms, available pills, or other means.
- Someone talking or writing about death, dying or suicide, when these actions are out of the ordinary for the person.

SYMPTOMS TO LOOK FOR

- Hopelessness
- Rage, uncontrolled anger, seeking revenge
- Acting reckless or engaging in risky activities, seemingly without thinking
- Feeling trapped – like there's no way out
- Increased alcohol or drug use
- Withdrawing from friends, family and society
- Anxiety, agitation, unable to sleep or sleeping all the time
- Dramatic mood changes
- No reason for living; no sense of purpose in life

BE AWARE OF THE FACTS

1. Suicide is preventable. Most suicidal individuals desperately want to live; they are just unable to see alternatives to their problems.
2. Most suicidal individuals give definite warnings of their suicidal intentions, but others are either unaware of the significance of these warnings or do not know how to respond to them.
3. Talking about suicide does not cause someone to be suicidal.
4. Approximately 32,000 Americans kill themselves every year. The number of suicide attempts is much greater and often results in serious injury.
5. Suicide is the third leading cause of death among young people ages 15-24, and it is the eighth leading cause of death among all persons.
6. The suicide rate is higher among the elderly (over 65) than any other age group.
7. Four times as many men kill themselves as compared to women, yet three times as many women attempt suicide as compared to men.
8. Suicide occurs across all age, economic, social, and ethnic boundaries.
9. Veterans in the general population are at an increased risk for suicide.
10. Firearms are currently the most utilized method of suicide by essentially all groups (male, female, young, old, white, non-white).

11. Surviving family members not only suffer the trauma of losing a loved one to suicide, and may themselves be at higher risk for suicide and emotional problems.

WAYS TO BE HELPFUL TO SOMEONE WHO IS THREATENING SUICIDE

1. Be aware. Learn the warning signs.
2. Get involved. Become available. Show interest and support.
3. Ask if he/she is thinking about suicide.
4. Be direct. Talk openly and freely about suicide.
5. Be willing to listen. Allow for expression of feelings. Accept the feelings.
6. Be non-judgmental. Don't debate whether suicide is right or wrong, or feelings are good or bad. Don't lecture on the value of life.
7. Don't dare him/her to do it.
8. Don't give advice by making decisions for someone else to tell them to behave differently.
9. Don't ask 'why'. This encourages defensiveness.
10. Offer empathy, not sympathy.
11. Don't act shocked. This creates distance.
12. Don't be sworn to secrecy. Seek support.
13. Offer hope that alternatives are available, do not offer glib reassurance; it only proves you don't understand.
14. Take action! Remove means! Get help from individuals or agencies specializing in crisis intervention and suicide prevention or call 1 (800) 273-8255.
15. If the person is in an acute crisis, escort them to the nearest emergency room or call 911.

BE AWARE OF FEELINGS, THOUGHTS, AND BEHAVIORS

People in the midst of a crisis often perceive their dilemma as inescapable and feel an utter loss of control. Frequently, they:

- Can't stop the pain • Can't make decisions • Can't think clearly
- Can't see the possibility of change • Can't see themselves as worthwhile
 - Can't get someone's attention • Can't see to get control
- Can't see any way out • Can't sleep, eat or work • Can't get out of the depression
 - Can't make the sadness of away

TALK TO SOMEONE – YOU ARE NOT ALONE

SUICIDE PREVENTION 1-800-273-TALK
www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

WITH HELP THERE IS HOPE

For more information call:
Dr. Matthew Nichols in Manhattan at 212.686.7500 ext. 7598
Dr. Yvette Branson in Brooklyn at 718.836.6600 ext. 6807