



Suicide: Warning Signs and What To Do

Warning Signs

A person may signal any number of warning signs that he or she may be contemplating suicide. Those signals can be verbal and nonverbal expressions, behavioral, or situational.

Verbal and nonverbal Signs:

- "I just can't take it any longer."
- "I'm no good anyway."
- "They'd be better off without me."
- "It doesn't matter, I'm not going to be here much longer anyway."
- Artwork with death and suicide themes
- Writing with themes of death and suicide
- Body language that indicates closing down or anxiety

Behavioral Signs:

- Depression
- Angry outbursts
- Prior suicide attempts
- Withdrawal or isolation
- Giving away prized possessions
- Use of alcohol and/or other drugs to escape pain
- Neglect of appearance or health
- Sudden and/or extreme changes in sleeping and/or eating patterns
- Changes in work/school attendance/performance
- Self-destructive and risk-taking acts

Situational Signs:

- Major loss – of a loved one, home, pet, status, relationship
- A suicide of a friend or family member
- A history of losses
- Life problems that appear to have no solution

What To Do

- Tell the person that you are concerned about him or her
- Say what you have noticed that is making you concerned
- LISTEN – don't give advice, make judgments, or attempt to solve his or her problems – just listen
- Take the problems seriously
- Acknowledge the pain and difficulties
- Tell the person that, for some people, the things you have noticed may be signs that he or she is thinking about suicide.

Ask one of these questions:

- Are you thinking about suicide?
- Are you feeling so bad that you want to die?
- Are you thinking of hurting yourself?
- If the answer is yes, keep asking questions:
 - How are you planning to do it?
 - When are you going to do it?
 - Do you have what you need to do it? (access to drugs, guns, knives, rope, a car)

The more dangerous and definite the plan, the greater the suicide risk.

- Be calm, reassuring, and supportive. Be patient if it takes time, and don't blame.
- Don't make promises. **Don't hold a secret that might result in death.**
- Talk through some steps that will prevent imminent physical harm. Help work out a plan to ensure ongoing safety. If he or she refuses, seek help: a friend, family member, trusted adult, police, or the Crisisline.
- When the person is safe, find someone to talk to about how it was for you. You too need support. Take care of yourself.