

Handling Suicidal Threats

Do you know what to do if someone you know is threatening suicide? Your willingness to talk - or simply to listen-can help lead the person to getting needed help.

While someone may have indicated to you that he or she is threatening suicide, there is still a strong chance that you can help avoid a tragedy. If possible, get the person on the phone with our 24-hour crisis line counselors:

1-800-584-3578

Here are some others ways to be helpful to someone who is threatening suicide:

- Get involved. Become available. Show interest and support.
- Be direct. Talk openly and freely about suicide.
- Be willing to listen. Allow for expressions of feelings and accept those feelings.
- Be non-judgmental. Don't debate whether suicide is right or wrong, or whether feelings are good or bad. Don't lecture on the value of life.
- Don't dare him or her to do it.
- Don't give advice by making decisions for someone else to tell them to behave differently.
- Don't ask why. This encourages defensiveness.
- Offer empathy, not sympathy.
- Don't act shocked. This creates distance.
- Don't be sworn to secrecy. Seek support.
- Take action. Remove any means that may be used to follow through on a suicide threat.
- Offer hope that alternatives are available. Do not offer glib reassurances; it only proves you don't understand.

It's important to understand that suicide is preventable. Most suicidal individuals desperately want to live; they are just unable to see alternatives to their problems.

Here are some other facts about suicide:

- 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.
- Talking about suicide does not cause someone to be suicidal.
- Approximately 31,000 Americans kill themselves every year. The number of suicide attempts is much greater and often results in serious injury.
- 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.
- Youth (15-24) suicide rates increased more than 200% from the 1950s to the late 1970s.

- Following the late 1970s, the rates for youth suicide have remained stable.
- The suicide rate is higher among the elderly (over 65) than any other age group.
- Four times as many men kill themselves as compared to women, yet three to four times as many women attempt suicide compared to men.
- Firearms are currently the most utilized method of suicide by essentially all groups (male, female, young, old, white, and non-white).
- Surviving family members not only suffer the trauma of losing a loved one to suicide, but also are themselves at higher risk for suicide and emotional problems.

Suicide cuts across all age, economic, social, and ethnic boundaries. By understanding the signs and knowing how to help, you may be able to help someone get the help he or she needs.