

## When You Fear Someone May Take Their Own Life

**Most suicides give some warning of their intentions. The most effective way to prevent a friend or loved one from taking their life is to recognize when someone is at risk, take the warning signs seriously and know how to respond.**

**The depression and emotional crises that so often precede suicides are — in most cases — both recognizable and treatable.**

### **Take It Seriously**

- Seventy-five percent of all suicides give some warning of their intentions to a friend or family member.
- All suicide threats and attempts must be taken seriously.

### **Be Willing to Listen**

- Take the initiative to ask what is troubling them and persist to overcome any reluctance to talk about it.
- If professional help is indicated, the person you care about is more apt to follow such a recommendation if you have listened to him or her.
- If your friend or loved one is depressed, don't be afraid to ask whether he or she is considering suicide, or even if they have a particular plan or method in mind.
- Do not attempt to argue anyone out of suicide. Rather, let the person know you care and understand, that he or she is not alone, that suicidal feelings are temporary, that depression can be treated and that problems can be solved. Avoid the temptation to say, "You have so much to live for," or "Your suicide will hurt your family."

### **Seek Professional Help**

- Be actively involved in encouraging the person to see a physician or mental health professional immediately. Individuals contemplating suicide often don't believe they can be helped, so you may have to do more. For example, a suicidal college student resisted seeing a psychiatrist until his roommate offered to accompany him on the visit. A 17-year-old accompanied her younger sister to a psychiatrist because her parents refused to become involved.
- You can make a difference by helping the person in need of help find a knowledgeable mental health professional or reputable treatment facility.

### **In an Acute Crisis**

- In an acute crisis, take your friend or loved one to an emergency room or walk-in clinic at a psychiatric hospital.
- Do not leave them alone until help is available.
- Remove from the vicinity any firearms, drugs or sharp objects that could be used in a suicide attempt.
- Hospitalization may be indicated and may be necessary at least until the crisis abates.
- If a psychiatric facility is unavailable, go to your nearest hospital or clinic.
- If the above options are unavailable, call your local emergency number or the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK.

## **Follow-up on Treatment**

- Suicidal patients are often hesitant to seek help and may run away or avoid it after an initial contact unless there is support for their continuing.
- If medication is prescribed, take an active role to make sure they are taking the medication and be sure to notify the physician about any unexpected side effects. Often, alternative medications can be prescribed.

## **Warning Signs of Suicide**

**All of the warning signs of suicide are magnified in importance if the patient is depressed. Although most depressed people are not suicidal, most suicidal people are depressed. Serious depression can be manifested in obvious sadness, but often it is rather expressed as a loss of pleasure or withdrawal from activities that had been enjoyable.**

**Depression is present if at least five or more of the following symptoms are present during a two-week period; at least one of the symptoms must be either depressed mood or loss of interest or pleasure in usual activities.**

- Depressed mood
- Loss of interest or pleasure in usual activities
- Change in appetite or weight
- Change in sleeping patterns
- Speaking and/or moving with unusual speed or slowness
- Loss of interest or pleasure in usual activities
- Decrease in sexual drive
- Fatigue or loss of energy
- Feelings of worthlessness, self-reproach or guilt
- Diminished ability to think or concentrate, slowed thinking or indecisiveness
- Thoughts of death, suicide, or wishes to be dead

**Suicide can be prevented. While some suicides occur without any outward warning, most do not. Prevent suicide among loved ones by learning to recognize the signs of someone at risk, taking those signs *seriously* and knowing how to respond to them. The emotional crises that usually precede suicide are most often both recognizable and treatable. Prevent suicide through early recognition and treatment of depression and other psychiatric illnesses.**