

Addressing Suicide Concerns

If a team member has expressed suicidal thoughts or is engaging in worrisome behavior, it's important to take immediate action. The following steps will help to ensure her or his safety:

- 1. Ask to speak privately with the person.** Express your concerns about his or her statements or behavior. Avoid labeling the person's behavior (by referring to it as "depression" or "mental illness," for example), as this could have implications under the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Sample language: "You mentioned that you've been feeling bad lately. I'm concerned about how you're doing."

- 2. Listen to the response.** Ask open-ended questions and be patient if the person is reluctant to speak. Let him or her know that you will do your best to protect privacy, but safety concerns may require you to involve other resources.

Sample language: "I will keep what you tell me private unless it's absolutely necessary to inform someone else. Your safety is my first priority."

- 3. Clarify worrisome statements.** If a team member makes one or more statements indicating that he or she may be contemplating suicide, ask, "Are you thinking about harming yourself?" If the person says "Yes," do not leave him or her alone.
- 4. Consult with HR, your Medical department, and LifeMatters.** Act quickly to ensure that the individual receives appropriate assistance. Contact HR and LifeMatters for consultation even if the person assures you that she or he is not considering suicide.

- 5. Coordinate with appropriate resources.** If, after consultation, it is determined that the individual is at risk, reach out to his or her emergency contact, an emergency medical team, or the police. HR and LifeMatters can guide you in determining the appropriate resources to contact at this time.

- 6. Make a referral to LifeMatters.** Encourage the team member to call from your office or offer to have LifeMatters contact him or her.

Sample language: "LifeMatters is available day or night. Professional counselors can help if you are troubled or stressed, or when you simply need someone to talk to. I urge you to call."

- 7. Offer ongoing resources.** Make sure the person has the LifeMatters telephone number before he or she leaves the workplace. Emphasize that LifeMatters services are available 24/7/365 on a live-answer basis.

- 8. Follow up.** If it is determined that the team member needs to take time off to deal with personal issues, coordinate with HR and provide appropriate support. Periodically check in to ask how the person is doing after her or his return (or should he or she continue to work uninterrupted). Remind the person about any helpful resources your company may offer.

People sometimes hold off on asking about suicide because they fear that they may "push" a troubled person into committing self-harm. In fact, expressing appropriate concern and making sure a team member gets access to professional help is the best thing you can do to ensure that her or his safety is protected.

The LifeMatters Management Consultation Service can help educate you on how to address suicide concerns and assist with specific situations. Call anytime.

Call the **LifeMatters®** by Empathia Management Consultation Service toll-free anytime. **1-800-367-7474**

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