



Suicide Intervention

When You Suspect Someone You Know is Thinking About Suicide

Suicide is the second leading cause of death among youth and the sixth leading cause of death among adults. When we do not discuss suicide in a responsive way, myths and misinformation exist that include:

- Suicide gestures and threats are a way of getting attention; ignoring the person is the best thing to do.
- There are no warning signs.
- Those who talk about it do not do it.
- A person who makes a non-fatal attempt is protected from further attempts.
- This person isn't the type to attempt suicide.
- Talking about suicide will cause people to make an attempt.

None of the above is true and interfere with our ability to reach out and help. People usually think about suicide when they experience overwhelming emotional pain, their thinking becomes constricted and they feel increasingly helpless and hopeless. Warning signs include:

- Isolation or withdrawal from activities they were previously involved in.
- Depression, unhappy, prolonged periods of sadness.
- Deterioration in work or school performances.
- Increased use of drugs and alcohol.
- Self-demeaning statements (e.g. *I'm no good, I'd be better off dead*).
- Making final arrangements, giving away prized possessions.
- Increased hostility or negativity towards others.
- Problems with sleep and appetite (too much or too little).
- Increased anxiety or restlessness.
- A major significant loss.

The presence of one of these does not mean risk for suicide. However they should raise concern that someone you know is not doing well.

What You Can Do

If you suspect that someone you know may be thinking about suicide, you can show you CARE. CARE stands for four actions – Confirm, Assess, Respond, Evaluate.

CONFIRM:

Engage this person in a conversation, ask how they are doing. If you get the sense that they are feeling helpless, hopeless, overwhelmed or in a lot of pain ask:

"Has it become so bad that you have thoughts about suicide?"

ASSESS:

If they reply *yes*, ask how long they have experienced these thoughts, if there is a plan and the means to carry it out and if they have discussed this with anyone. Also find out how imminent their plan is by asking:

"How close are you to acting on your thoughts?"

RESPOND:

Encourage the person to talk about what is distressing them. Active listening on your part is important and help to alleviate some of the distress they are feeling. If you are concerned that the person may act on their suicidal thoughts, offer your support in obtaining additional help.

EVALUATE:

Helping someone who is struggling with the decision to live or die is not easy. It is important that you take the time to talk with someone who is knowledgeable about suicide regarding what you have experienced. Suicidal behaviour should not be handled in isolation. Always involve others. Be aware of the phone numbers for the local telephone crisis line, hospital emergency department and clinics in your area.