

My friend is talking about suicide

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Everyone feels down, sad or depressed at some time—especially with the pressures from school, exams, family and relationships. However, for some people, feelings of sadness and hopelessness don't go away, and life may seem unbearable. This may lead them to think about suicide.

70% of people who commit suicide tell someone about it in advance. One study observed that nearly 50% of suicide victims had a positive blood alcohol level. Between 20% and 40% of people who kill themselves have previously attempted suicide. Those who have made serious suicide attempts are at much higher risk for actually taking their lives. Although most depressed people are not suicidal, most suicidal people are depressed.

What Can I Do to Help Someone Who is Suicidal?

1. *Take it seriously.*

More than 75% of all individuals who complete suicides did things in the few weeks or months prior to their deaths to indicate to others that they were in deep despair. Anyone expressing suicidal feelings needs immediate attention.

2. *Suicidal behavior is a cry for help.*

The fact that a person is still alive is evidence that part of him/her wants to remain alive. Suicidal individuals are ambivalent—parts of them want to live and parts of them want to end the pain. If a suicidal person turns to you, it is likely they believe you are caring and trust you to help. No matter how negative their view on life, they are doing a positive thing by talking to you.

3. *Be willing to give and get help sooner rather than later.*

Evidence points to the fact that getting help as soon as possible is the best way to help your friend. Suicidal individuals are often afraid that trying to get help may make them look stupid, foolish or sinful. They often fear rejection, punishment, suspension from school, records being created about their condition or involuntary commitment. You should do everything you can to help them with their pain and get them help.

4. *Ask.*

Talking about suicide will not give someone the idea. Asking them about feelings of suicide can be difficult. But in fact, talking about it may help them feel less alone and more cared about—the opposite of what may have led them to the suicidal feelings in the first place.

How to ask:

- Are you thinking about dying?
- Are you thinking about hurting yourself?
- Are you thinking about suicide?
- Have you thought about how you would do it?
- Do you know when you would do it?
- Do you have the means to do it?

5. *Listen.*

Listen to your friend without judgment, and let them know that you are there for them and care for them. Reassure your friend that you are glad they turned to you.



6. *If you think the person is in immediate danger, do not leave him alone.*

If the means by which they talk about committing suicide are present, try to get rid of them. Call someone you trust, 911, or take them to an emergency room. If you are in a situation where you don't know much about the person—such as an online friendship—encourage them to call 911 on their own or to call a suicide hotline. If they refuse to call, try to learn whatever personal information you can about them—don't be afraid to ask them their address, phone number and other information to help get them emergency help.

7. *Urge professional help.*

Encourage them with persistence to seek help for their feelings. Be patient and let them know you care. Accompany them to CAPS, or if it is after hours, call (321) 674-8111 and ask to speak with the counselor-on-call. If necessary, accompany them to an emergency room.

8. *Tell.*

Even if you feel like you would be betraying your friend if you tell, seek help. Do not try to do it alone. It is safest to get help for the person and for yourself. Tell someone you trust, or if necessary call 911.

Warning Signs of Suicide

- Talking about suicide or death
- Talking about “going away”
- Talking about feeling hopeless or guilty
- Pulling away from friends and/or family
- Losing the desire to go out or do things they used to enjoy
- Engaging in self-destructive behavior—drinking alcohol, taking drugs, etc.

Conditions associated with increased risk of suicide

- Death of a relative or friend
- Divorce, separation, stress on family
- Loss of health (real or perceived)
- Loss of job, scholarship, money, self-esteem or a drastic drop in grades
- Alcohol or drug abuse
- Depression (depression that seems to quickly disappear for no apparent reason is cause for concern)
- Anxiety disorders

What is Suicidal Behavior?

- Previous suicide attempts
- Explicit statements of suicidal thoughts or feelings
- Development of a suicidal plan, acquiring the means, “rehearsal” behavior, setting a time for the attempt
- Self-inflicted injuries, such as cuts, burns or head banging
- Reckless behavior
- Giving away favorite possessions
- Inappropriately saying goodbye
- Statements such as: “I’m going away on a real long trip,” “You won’t have to worry about me anymore,” “I want to go to sleep and never wake up,” “I’m so depressed, I just can’t go on,” “Does God punish suicides?,” “Voices are telling me to do bad things”



WHERE TO GET HELP

Counseling services and crisis intervention hotlines for anyone with suicidal thoughts, or anyone who wishes to discuss a problem, are:

- **CAPS: (321) 674-8050**
or CAPS after hours: (321) 674-8111
- **Brevard Helpline: 211 or (321) 632-6688**
- **National Hopeline Network:**
(800) SUICIDE (784-2433)
- **National Suicide Prevention Hotline:**
(800) 273-TALK (8255)

Florida Institute of Technology

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