

Each year, an estimated 30,000 Americans commit suicide, while thousands more attempt to do so. Fortunately, warning signs make it easier to identify someone who may commit suicide. The earlier someone with a problem is identified, the sooner that person can get help. There are two sets of suicide warning signs. The first set includes what are called **risk factors** and **trigger events**. Risk factors increase the likelihood that someone might consider suicide, but they usually don't lead that person to actually attempt it. Trigger events often lead people to give suicide greater consideration or to actually attempt it. Someone who experiences a trigger event and who also has one or more risk factors in his/her past is at high risk for suicide.

### **Risk factors**

- Having a history of depressive episodes.
- Having a history of alcohol or drug problems.
- Having a history of suicide attempts.
- Having personal experience with other suicides, especially by family members or close friends.
- Having angry, aggressive or impulsive personality traits.
- Being a rigid, inflexible thinker.
- Having been diagnosed with a borderline or antisocial personality disorder.
- Having access to firearms or prescription drugs.

### **Trigger events**

- Experiencing profound interpersonal loss or rejection, such as the loss of a spouse or loved one, loss of mobility following injury, loss of a home, even loss of a pet.
- Experiencing divorce or an impending breakup.

- Losing a job or experiencing a serious occupational or school problem.
- Having legal or financial problems.
- Being diagnosed with a life-threatening illness.

The second set of warning signs are indicators that suicide may be imminent, and show that the individual may actually be making plans to take his/her life. This person may:

- Give away favorite possessions.
- Write a will.
- Glorify or elevate death in conversation.
- Mention others who have died, suggesting that she or he may join the deceased.
- Write poetry or prose laced with images of death and profound loneliness.
- Increase alcohol or other drug use.
- Continuously and persistently discount the positive and embrace the negative, almost as though to reassure him/herself that suicide is the right thing to do.
- Make preparations or talk about a suicide plan that is concrete, specific and lethal.
- Seem detached from emotions and withdrawn from friends or family members.
- Experience uncharacteristic relief from otherwise debilitating depression.

### **Populations at risk**

In addition to these warning signs, certain groups are at special risk of suicide. These are:

- Combat veterans, especially those who have been diagnosed with posttraumatic stress disorder or depression.
- Male executives who are authoritarian or rigid thinkers.

- Menopausal females who perceive themselves as having outlived their usefulness or who are weary of their nurturing responsibilities.
- Younger to midlife African Americans who are angry, substance abusing, estranged from their families and inclined to violence.
- People with chronic pain or terminal illness.
- Alcohol or other drug abusers.
- Midlife males who may feel estranged from their adult children and spouses and who may have economic problems along with interpersonal or sexual problems.

## **Facts on Suicide**

- **Suicide is the eleventh leading cause of death for all Americans**
- **On average, one suicide occurs every 16 minutes in the US.**
- **Suicide rates differ by age, gender, race and socioeconomic and marital status. Over 70 percent of all suicides in the US are committed by white males.**
- **There are four male deaths by suicide for every female death.**
- **Suicide is the third leading cause of death among people aged 15 to 24 and the fifth leading cause of death for youngsters 5 to 14.**
- **1.3% of all deaths in the US are from suicide.**



## What to do

If someone you know meets several or more warning signs for suicide, or mentions that he or she is considering suicide, it's important to respond appropriately.

First, take the person's words or actions seriously. Joking about, denying or ignoring a person's remarks about possible suicide will probably make the person feel worse. Ask the person the following:

- What has made you feel this way?
- Have you thought about how you would do this?
- Have you taken steps toward making this happen?

If it's evident that the person has strong thoughts about suicide, it's important to get the person immediate help. Here's what you can say from your heart to distract the person's attention from self-harm and direct him or her to help:

- I don't want you to do this.
- I can understand how things might seem so bad that you might have such thoughts, but let's talk about it.
- You should talk to someone about your feelings. Let me help you find someone.

Then, call your local crisis hotline or law enforcement agency to report your concerns. Emergency dispatchers are trained to respond to such situations.

In the meantime, offer reassurance to the person. Also, don't lecture or point out all the reasons the person has to live. Instead, be comforting and understanding. Listen to the individual, and reassure him or her that help is available.

## Help is available

Just talking about your problems sometimes leads to new solutions. If you or someone you know needs information, guidance or help, contact the resource listed below or look online for local professionals who can help.



# SUICIDE WARNING SIGNS