

7 Tips for Talking with Youth or Adults, Friends, Families or Strangers in Crisis

From the Forefront: Innovations in Suicide Prevention (University of Washington)
with additional, adapted content from the Montana Safe Schools Center

1. **Don't assume** a person is *not* at risk for suicide because you perceive them as successful or otherwise low risk.

.... **Anyone can be at risk for suicide**....but you might be able to help them too.

Some studies suggest that at any moment in time 1 out of 20 individuals may be having some thought of suicide.

In some ways, occasional suicidal thoughts are part of being human. However: ***Suicide IS preventable.***

--LEARN--

2. **Look for Warning signs:** person is in emotional pain, desperate, hopeless, etc.; unusual sleeping, eating or other health issues; the person is giving away possessions, withdrawal, losing interest in activities, using more alcohol or drugs, acting impulsively or recklessly, etc.; the person states "I won't be needing these anymore", "I just can't take it anymore", "I wish I were dead", "Everyone will be better off without me", etc.
3. **E**mpathize with them: If you think someone may be at risk for suicide, **talk to them about it**. Make a **connection** – the more **approachable** you are the more likely they will accept your help. Be a good **listener** (give full attention, don't interrupt, don't judge, control your own fears so you can focus on the other person). Examples of things you could say to start the conversation:
 - a. "How are things going?" "You seem upset; do you want to talk about it?"
 - b. "I care about you, and you are going through a lot. Lets talk."
 - c. "It sounds like you have so many problems you are dealing with. Sometimes when people feel so alone or under so much pressure they might think about suicide."

Continue to **listen**, build rapport and trust with them, and help them feel **understood**. "That sounds like a very difficult situation." "I would be upset about that too." Please don't judge them or tell them they have so much to live for or that they shouldn't think that way.

4. **ASK** the person clearly and directly if they are thinking about suicide. “Are you thinking about suicide?” or “Are you thinking about ending your life?” or “When you say _____ do you mean you are thinking about killing yourself?”
 - a. **Asking the suicide question does not increase risk.**
 - b. Asking the question often provides relief for the person.
 - c. Sharing suicidal thoughts reduces feelings of isolation.
 - d. Having someone ask the suicide question shows that someone cares, talking generally provides comfort and provides relief.
5. **Restrict their access to lethal means:** Find out if they have access to guns or ropes or stockpiling medication. Work with them, or their family or friends to secure those items so the person at risk doesn’t have immediate access to them.
6. **Next level of care:** Let them know you are concerned and that you would like to **help** them. Ask if you can **help connect them with someone who has more expertise to help.** Say: “Can I give you the name of a counselor who might be able to help” or “I’m willing to go with you to our local help center [or school counselor etc.,] or... “Lets create a plan together about who you can contact in the future if you feel at risk again.”
7. Remember,... **its not your responsibility to fix any or all of their problems.**

But you can help them stay safe NOW.

***Anyone can receive anonymous, free, 24-hour assistance by calling 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
Here in King County.... That number automatically routes you the the Crisis Clinic***

*If you or someone you know is in **immediate risk** for suicide, call 911or take them to the nearest emergency room if it is safe for you and them to do so.*