

Do you suspect a friend, brother, maybe a sister of being at risk of suicide but you are not really sure? Most people who are considering suicide do give signs of their distress, although not all show warning signs. Some people may be at a higher risk of suicide just because of certain factors in their lives. Knowing what to look for can help you find help.

### **Warning signs**

Most people who are considering suicide do show signs of their distress, although some may not. Those who exhibit changes such as these may be at risk for harming themselves:

- Talking about suicide or a plan for suicide.
- Saying things like, "I'm going to kill myself," "I wish I were dead," "I shouldn't have been born," "I won't be a problem for you much longer," "Nothing matters," or "It's no use."
- Making statements about hopelessness, helplessness or worthlessness.
- Complaining of being a bad person or feeling "rotten inside," refusing help or feeling beyond help. Not tolerating praise or rewards.
- Giving away favourite possessions or making a will.
- Being preoccupied with death.
- Showing a loss of interest in pleasurable activities or things they once cared about. Always feeling bored.
- Showing marked personality changes and serious mood changes. Withdrawing from friends and family.
- Having trouble concentrating or difficulties with school work.
- Complaining frequently about physical symptoms often related to emotions, such as stomach aches, headaches or fatigue. Changes in eating and sleeping habits.
- Showing impulsive behaviours, such as violent actions, rebellious behaviour or running away.
- Becoming suddenly cheerful after a period of depression (may mean the youth has already made the decision to escape their problems through suicide).

All suicidal thoughts or threats must be taken seriously, as should any behaviour that is out of character for your friend. Trust your

instincts. If you are concerned about someone, tell others about it. Get help from family, friends, clergy, teachers, counsellors, doctors, crisis lines, mental health services or hospital emergency departments.

### **Risk factors**

A person may be more likely to consider suicide if some of these factors apply in their life:

- Previous suicide attempt or gesture.
- Family History of suicidal behaviour.
- Feelings of hopelessness or isolation.
- Psychiatric disorders or mental illness.
- Substance use or abuse.
- Life stressors, such as interpersonal losses and legal or disciplinary problems.
- Physical abuse.
- Sexual abuse.
- Sexual orientation (gay, lesbian and trans-gendered).
- Juvenile delinquency.
- School or work problems.
- Contagion or imitation (the suicide of a friend or exposure to media reports of suicide).
- Chronic physical illness.
- Living in isolation.
- Access to more lethal means, such as firearms and medication.
- Impulsive behaviours.
- Homelessness.

Some young people in minority or marginalized groups have an increased risk of suicide.



# Warning Signs and Risk Factors