Warning Signs of Suicide (FACTS)

Listen and look for these warning signs for suicidal behavior. Warning signs are the earliest detectable indication that a person is at heightened risk for suicide *in the near term* (that is, within minutes, hours, days), as opposed to risk factors that suggest longer-term risk (that is, a year to a lifetime). Note that aside from direct statements or behaviors threatening suicide, it is often a constellation of signs that raise concern, rather than one or two symptoms alone. The following signs are presented in a hierarchical manner, organized by degree of risk, and were developed by an expert working group convened by the American Association of Suicidology.

Warning Signs for Suicide and Corresponding Actions*

Call 911 or seek immediate help from a mental health provider when you hear or see any of these behaviors:

- Someone threatening to hurt or kill himself or herself, or talking of wanting to do so
- Someone looking for ways to kill himself or herself by seeking access to firearms, available pills, or other means
- Someone talking or writing about death, dying, or suicide, when these actions are out of the ordinary for the person

Seek help by contacting a mental health professional or calling the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255) for a referral should you witness, hear, or see someone exhibiting one or more of these behaviors:

- Hopelessness
- Rage, uncontrolled anger, seeking revenge
- Acting reckless or engaging in risky activities, seemingly without thinking
- Feeling trapped—like there's no way out
- Withdrawing from friends, family, and society
- Anxiety, agitation, unable to sleep or sleeping all the time
- Dramatic mood changes
- No reason for living; no sense of purpose in life

* Adapted from American Association of Suicidology, www.suicidology.org.

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Warning signs of suicide can be organized around the word "FACTS":

Feelings
Actions
Changes
Threats
Situations

Feelings

- Hopelessness: feeling like things are bad and won't get any better
- Fear of losing control, going crazy, or harming oneself or others
- Helplessness: a belief that there's nothing that can make life better
- Worthlessness: feeling useless and of no value
- Self-hate, guilt, or shame
- Extreme sadness or loneliness
- Anxiety or worry

Actions

- Increased use of alcohol or other drugs
- Talking or writing about death or destruction
- Looking online for ways to kill yourself
- Engaging in self-destructive or harming behaviors (like cutting)
- Aggression
- Recklessness

Changes

- Personality: behaving like a different person, becoming withdrawn, feeling tired all the time, not caring about anything, or becoming more talkative or outgoing
- Behavior: inability to concentrate, drop in grades
- Sleeping pattern: sleeping all the time or not being able to sleep
- Eating habits: loss of appetite and/or overeating
- Losing interest in friends, hobbies, or personal appearance; isolating oneself
- Sudden improvement after a period of being down or withdrawn

Threats

- Statements such as "I wonder what it's like to die"
- Threats such as "I won't be around much longer" or "You'd be better off without me"
- Suicide attempts

Situations

- Getting into trouble at school, at home, or with law enforcement
- Recent losses
- Changes in life that feel overwhelming
- Being exposed to suicide or the death of a peer under any circumstances
- Being bullied or physically or sexually abused

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK (8255)

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