



ask



listen



refer

Experiencing a suicidal crisis can feel unsettling, painful, and overwhelming.

Many students have never directly dealt with a suicidal person, and when such a situation presents itself, they are likely to feel helpless and overwhelmed. The following guidelines are presented to help provide a sense of direction and facilitate the helping process.

Know the Warning Signs

Although most depressed people are not suicidal, most suicidal people are depressed - know the warning signs of depression:

- Feelings of worthlessness or guilt
- Pessimism
- Hopelessness
- Loss of interest/pleasure in formerly enjoyable activities
- Change in appetite or weight
- Sleep problems
- Helplessness
- Anxiety
- Social withdrawal
- Decrease in sexual drive
- Fatigue or loss of energy
- Diminished ability to think or concentrate, slowed thinking or indecisiveness
- Thoughts of death, suicide, or wishes to be dead
- Unrelenting low mood

There are other signs that someone may be considering suicide

- Increased use of alcohol and/or other drugs
- Recent impulsiveness and taking unnecessary risks
- Current talk of suicide, expressing strong wish to die, or talking about wanting "pain" to end
- Making a suicide plan
- Giving away prized possessions
- Saying goodbye to friends/family
- Purchasing a firearm
- Obtaining other means of killing oneself

What to Do

Ask and listen. Talking about the person's thoughts openly and frankly can help prevent a person from acting on them. This may include asking if the person has a particular plan or method in mind.

You might think mentioning suicide may give the person the idea but this is highly unlikely; if someone is showing warning signs of being suicidal, he or she has, in all likelihood, already thought about it.

Give hope. Sometimes people can't think of any other solutions to what is causing the distress. You can acknowledge that the person currently feels hopeless but also convey that things can get better and there are other options. You may even be able to offer some alternative actions.

Do not attempt to argue anyone out of suicide. Rather, let the person know you care and understand, that he or she is not alone, that suicidal feelings are temporary, that depression can be treated, and that problems can be solved. Avoid the temptation to say things such as, "You have so much to live for," or "Your suicide will hurt your family or friends."

Be genuine. If professional help is indicated, a person is more apt to follow such a recommendation if you have genuinely listened to him or her.

Refer Person to Seek Professional Help

Be actively involved in encouraging the person to see a physician or mental health professional immediately. Individuals contemplating suicide don't believe they can be helped, so you may have to do more such as offering to go with the person to his/her appointment.

In an Acute Crisis

(If you are still worried the person may harm him/herself)

- **Dial 911 if immediate assistance is needed**, particularly if you feel the person has already taken action (e.g., swallowed pills) or may do so without quick intervention.
- Find local resources for help by visiting suicide.missouri.edu and navigate to the 'Looking for help?' section.
- You or the person about whom you are concerned may call the Mid-MO 24-hour crisis hotline at (800) 395-2132, or the National Suicide Prevention Life-line at (800) 273-8255.

Remember to stay with the person (or on the phone) until help is available.

Resources Available in Missouri

- **Mid-Missouri Crisis Hotline:** (800) 445-5035
- **The Trevor Lifeline:** (866) 4-U-TREVOR (866-488-7386)
- **Veterans Suicide Prevention Lifeline:** (800) 273-8255 ext. 1
- **Suicide Prevention Resources Website:** suicide.missouri.edu

Want to learn more about how to help a friend?

Visit the Ask Listen Refer website at asklistenrefer.org and click on your campus!

Written by the University of Missouri Counseling Center, 119 Parker Hall, Columbia, MO 65211. (573) 882-6601
This publication is brought to you by Partners in Prevention, a coalition of twenty universities in Missouri.
Partners in Prevention is funded by the Missouri Department of Mental Health.

