



## Suicide Prevention

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National Suicide Prevention Week was September 6-12, 2009. Having a week dedicated to this cause is so important in saving many lives. Of course the goal is to spread the word every day of the year.

In this month's etip article I will address the very emotional and difficult topic of suicide. My goal is to help people recognize the signs of suicide and some tips for prevention for you or loved one. I will define suicide and provide some statistics. Most importantly we will learn to identify signs of suicidal behavior and ways to intervene before a tragedy occurs. Although the main focus is on preventing suicide, I will also include some helpful advice for the survivors of a suicide.



Suicide is defined as the intentional killing of oneself. The National Guard Family Program brochure reports that 30,000 people in the United States commit suicide every year. Suicide is the 11<sup>th</sup> cause of death in the United States BUT it is the 3<sup>rd</sup> highest cause of death among teenagers. The fact is that suicide does not discriminate, it happens in every age group, gender, occupation, social economic background and ethnic group. It is reported that about 734,000 people attempt suicide each year.

The reasons that motivate people to contemplate or commit suicide vary. For the most part suicide is the only way some people feel they can resolve problems or to deal with intense, overwhelming emotions. They see no end in sight and lose hope in the future. The following factors can contribute to suicide, most of the time it is many of these factors combined that leads to suicide.

1. Social isolation/loneliness
2. Intense feelings of grief due to a death of a loved one
3. Feeling guilty for causing injury or death to another person
4. Intense feelings after a break-up in a relationship
5. Domestic violence
6. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
7. Depression or other mental illness
8. Alcohol/drug abuse
9. Serious family, social, work, legal, financial problems
10. To avoid humiliation before family, friends and co-workers
11. Difficulty adjusting to changes in life
12. Serious chronic illness or terminal illness
13. Loss of hope
14. Previous suicide attempts
15. Family history of suicide

According to the Suicide Prevention Resource Center, there is a strong correlation between suicide and mental illness. About 95% of suicides that occur are associated with mental illness and substance abuse. However, it is important to note that there are some

people who attempt or commit suicide that did not have a history of mental illness; this percentage should not be overlooked.

If you or a loved one has suicidal thoughts, please contact 911 or go to your nearest emergency room for assistance. Some other resources to look into are:

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

1-800-273-TALK (8255)

TTY: 800-799-4TTY (4889)

[www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org)

Stop a Suicide Today

[www.stopasuicide.org](http://www.stopasuicide.org)

Stop a Suicide Today reports that 70% of people who kill themselves told someone or gave warning signs. Generally suicide is not an impulsive act, and in planning to kill themselves most people give some signs. There is a misconception that suicidal people want to die and no one can stop them. Most suicidal people are ambivalent about living or dying, they just want their pain to end. They might make many suicide attempts before they die. Unfortunately suicidal people cannot see an end to their pain and they choose a permanent choice to a temporary problem. Hopefully, by recognizing the following warning signs we might be able to prevent someone from committing suicide. Some warnings signs to look for:



1. Threatening to hurt or kill themselves. They might say “I want to kill myself” or something less direct such as “The world would be better of without me”
2. Looking for ways to kill themselves by obtaining firearms, sharp objects or pills
3. Talking or writing about death, dying or suicide on a regular basis, especially if this is out of character for them
4. Engaging in risky behavior without thought to the consequences
5. Expressing feelings of rage and anger, seeking revenge
6. Feeling hopeless, feeling trapped, no way out
7. Increased drug or alcohol use
8. Feeling anxious
9. Erratic sleeping patterns, either being unable to sleep or sleeping to much
10. Experiencing dramatic mood swings
11. Isolating themselves from family, friends and society
12. Expressing no sense of purpose in life, no reason for living
13. Giving away personal belongings

We reviewed the warning signs of suicide. Now, we are going to review some ways we can intervene when someone is expressing suicidal thoughts. Stop a Suicide Today uses this helpful acronym:

## ACT!

**ACT** upon the suicidal thought or gesture; do not hesitate to ask them directly if they want to hurt or kill themselves. Erroneously people believe if we ask them, we risk putting the idea of suicide in their head.

**CARE**; show them that you care by being willing to listen, without any judgment. You can tell your loved one that you are worried about them and that you want to help them.

**TREATMENT**, get professional help. These are some suggestions to help facilitate getting treatment. If your loved one or friend is in immediate danger such as they took pills already or they have a weapon, call 911. It is strongly recommended that you do not take any risks when helping someone who is suicidal;

your safety is just as important. In some cases people are willing to kill others in order to commit suicide. If there is no immediate danger but your friend or family member is talking about suicide, they have a plan and they have the means to do it, do not leave them alone until help arrives. If possible remove any sharp objects, firearms (with caution) or pills from the area. Once the help arrives, tell the responders any specific information you know. For example, tell them the plan and means they want to hurt themselves, or if they took pills, what type, how much and when? Once at the hospital, the hospital staff will treat any injuries first. Then they will conduct an evaluation to determine the safety and level of care that the person needs. Some people will be admitted to the hospital for a few days in order to stabilize the crisis. Once the crisis has passed, the person most likely would be referred to a community mental health program or an individual provider to continue treatment.



After a suicidal crisis is over, you might feel overwhelmed and second guessing your intervention. Remember to take care of yourself, seek out support from family members, friends, clergy or counselors. Don't forget to remind yourself that you did the best you could under extreme circumstances.

Sadly, some people do not survive a suicide attempt. Their death leaves a lot of hurt and anguish for their loved ones that are left behind. Not only does it affect their loved ones but also their community. Organizations such as schools, business, police/fire departments, emergency responders and religious organizations can suffer. The devastation caused by someone's suicide is far reaching.

Some people who tried to help or survivors of a suicide might feel shock, grief, denial, anger, guilt, self blame, shame, sadness/depression or obsessive reviewing of the experience. It is not uncommon for some survivors to feel a sense of relief when their relationship with their loved one was troubled, especially after experiencing numerous suicide attempts. Not many people want to admit to it and might feel guilty for thinking this way. Although this might be hard to accept, please keep in mind that the person who died bears the responsibility of their decision. How do we help the survivors? Acknowledge their loss by expressing sympathy. Suicide can be a taboo subject in our society and in some religions; so many people might avoid discussing the death, which can impede the grieving process. It is important to show your support. Some tips: Listen, remain objective, expect repetition as part of the healing process, encourage them to talk. They might ask "Why?" or "What did I miss"? This question might never be answered. Try to

include the family member in work and school memorials. Offer to help with child care, cooking errands or other daily chores. Although it might seem helpful, avoid reminding them of their other blessings, they might be ready to hear that. Also avoid telling them they should be “over it” by now. Some people never fully get over the death of a loved one. Grief cannot be rushed, it can ebb and flow. Encourage the family or friends to go to counseling or support groups.

This article ended on a sad note. However, there are many people who survive suicidal thoughts and attempts and go on to lead positive lives. It can be a long road to recovery but with the help of family friends and the community there is hope. Since I could not include all aspects of suicide in this article I am providing some other resources for more information:

*Important Resources:*

**Connecticut:**

The United Way of CT Crisis Hotline "211" is a member of the National Lifeline crisis network and is the responder in CT. "211" assists persons in crisis, as well as those wanting to help someone they've encountered in crisis whether in person, by phone or on the Internet.

Call 211; [www.211ct.org/crisis/Default.asp](http://www.211ct.org/crisis/Default.asp)

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention-Southern CT Chapter  
Resources for survivors of suicide and those interested in suicide prevention.  
Carol Sebastian, Chair (203) 253-9939; [cesebastian1@yahoo.com](mailto:cesebastian1@yahoo.com)

**Nationwide:**

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. Assists persons in crisis, as well as those wanting to help someone they've encountered in crisis whether in person, by phone or on the Internet.

1-800-273-TALK (8255)

TTY: 800-799-4TTY (4889)

<http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org>

Stop a Suicide Today

<http://www.stopasuicide.org>

Suicide Prevention Resource Center

[www.sprc.org](http://www.sprc.org)

Suicide.org

[www.suicide.org](http://www.suicide.org)

This website provides specific information for suicide prevention among groups such as the elderly, teens, race, religion, gender, sexual orientation and more.

**Call Solutions EAP at 1-800-526-3485 for assistance for all of life's challenges.**

**It's free, confidential and open to your family members.**

**Check us out on-line at <http://www.solutions-eap.com>**