

CRISIS & SUICIDE: Assessment & Prevention

WHAT IS CRISIS?

- A **temporary** situation **perceived** as intolerable, wherein a person's coping resources are exceeded.
- The Chinese symbol for crisis represents **danger and opportunity**.
- Crises can happen to anyone.
- Webster's dictionary definition: A crucial or decisive situation; a **turning point**.

MYTHS ABOUT SUICIDE

- People who attempt suicide do not give warning signs.
 - *In reality, 80% of people who committed suicide gave verbal and/or nonverbal warning signs.*
- Suicide most often happens around the holidays
 - *In reality, suicide most often happens for college students in September and March and in the general population, in April/May.*
- Mentioning suicide will lead someone to attempt suicide.
 - *In reality, asking someone about their suicidal feelings may make the person feel relieved that someone finally recognized their emotional pain.*
- Suicidal people want to die and there is nothing that can be done about it.
 - *In reality, most suicidal people are ambivalent; that is, part of them is saying. "I want to die" but part of them is saying. "I want to live."*
- People who talk about suicide are just being manipulative or trying to get attention.
 - *In reality, most people who talk about suicide are genuinely distressed and should be taken seriously.*

AT RISK GROUPS INCLUDE PEOPLE WHO HAVE:

- experienced recent loss(es)
- a family history of suicide
- use of alcohol and/or drugs
- recent traumatic/stressful events
- feel marginalized, isolated, or alone
- a history of previous suicide attempt
- high achievers/the "perfect" student
- signs of depression

SOME EXAMPLES OF WARNING SIGNS OF POTENTIAL SUICIDE

Suicidal thoughts exist on a continuum. Talking in a direct, caring and non-judgmental way with a person you are concerned may be having suicidal thoughts is the best way to be helpful and determine what type of additional assistance the person may need and benefit from. Asking a person if they are having suicidal thoughts communicates caring and helps the person feel relieved to be able to talk about how they are feeling.

- Talking or joking about suicide.
- Wishes to be reunited with a deceased love one.
- Heightened interest in death and themes of death in television, art, music and literature.
- Talking or writing about death or "the end".
- A sudden increase in energy, happiness, or calmness after an intense depression.
- Giving away prized possessions, setting affairs in order, saying good-byes.
- Risky, impulsive or self-destructive behaviors.
- Increase in alcohol or other drug use.

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- Increase in depressive symptoms.
- Behavior changes after experiencing a significant loss.

TOP 10 WAYS TO HELP A STUDENT EXPRESSING SUICIDAL THOUGHTS

1. **BE DIRECT.** Talk openly and directly about suicide. “Are you thinking of killing yourself?”
2. **BE WILLING TO LISTEN.** Allow expressions of feelings. Accept feelings.
3. **BE NON-JUDGMENTAL.** Don’t debate whether suicide is right or wrong, or feelings are good or bad. Don’t lecture on the value of life.
4. **BE AVAILABLE.** Show interest and support. “Let’s get together and talk more. I want to be here for you.”
5. **DO TAKE IT SERIOUSLY.** “Let’s find a way to keep you safe.”
6. **DO NOT PULL AWAY OR PUT DISTANCE BETWEEN YOU AND THE STUDENT.** “Let’s stay connected about this.”
7. **DO NOT BE SWORN TO SECRECY.** Seek support.
8. **OFFER HOPE** that alternatives are available but do not offer glib assurances. “I know you feel helpless but with support from others, you will feel better.”
9. **TAKE ACTION WITHOUT ENDANGERING YOURSELF.** Remove means of suicide. “Please give me your pills.”
10. **GET HELP** from persons or agencies specializing in crisis intervention and suicide prevention.

RESOURCES

Counseling Services
 216 Baugher Student Center
 Elizabethtown College
 Elizabethtown, PA 17022-2298
 Phone = 717-361-1405
www.etown.edu/offices/counseling/

24 Hour Crisis Intervention Resources:
 Elizabethtown College Campus Security: 717-361-1111
 National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK
 Lancaster County Crisis Intervention Services: 717-394-2631

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