

## Helping A Person Who Is Suicidal

**by Angie Panos, Ph.D.**

One of the most difficult situations for a family member or a friend is when someone close to them expresses statements that suggest they are suicidal. It seems confusing that people, who survived a traumatic event, or a history of traumatic events, find themselves as their own worst enemy, feeling and thinking about dying. Often people who are depressed and thinking about suicide show several of these warning signs:

- Noticeable changes in eating or sleeping habits
- Withdrawal from family or friends
- Fantasies about running away or dying
- Persistent boredom and/or difficulty concentrating
- Drug and/or alcohol abuse
- Unexplained drop in their level of functioning
- Unusual neglect of appearance
- Drastic personality and mood change
- Complaints of physical problems
- A focus on themes of death
- Giving away prized possessions and making wills or burial plans
- Talking about suicide or making plans, even jokingly
- Threatening or attempting to kill themselves

Sometimes before committing suicide, people will hint about or threaten to kill themselves. These threats should always be taken seriously. If they have had a previous episode of depression and a suicide attempt it is very concerning. Most people who commit suicide have made at least one previous attempt. When people are suicidal they feel helpless and trapped. Their normal coping skills and problem solving abilities may be impaired, preventing them from being able to think creatively of the many options they have. They may begin to feel that others will not understand. Usually suicide is devastating to the family and friends left to cope with the loss. However, the suicidal person deludes themselves into thinking that their support system won't care or will be better off without them. The suicidal feelings may build to the point that the suffering individual thinks it is the only way out, which of course is not true.

### Ways to Help

If your friend or family member is talking to you about depression or suicidal feelings, let them know you care. Stay with them and help them call for professional help; don't leave it up to them. When requesting help from a counseling service, please let the receptionist know it is an emergency and ask to be connected through to a crisis counselor who can help.

If the friend or family member is planning to or has tried to attempt suicide they should immediately be taken to a hospital emergency room for an evaluation. Family should be advised to remove from the home any lethal, accessible means to commit suicide, such as medications, firearms, razors, knives, etc.

Your suffering friend or family member needs to feel that there is hope. They need to feel that people will listen, that things will get better, and that she or he can overcome their problems. So be honest, if you're worried about them, say so. You will not spark thoughts of suicide just by asking about it.

With professional treatment and support from family, friends, and coworkers, people who are suicidal can become healthy again.

Additional Information:

[www.suicidecrisiscenter.com](http://www.suicidecrisiscenter.com)

For Young Adults:

Friendship 911 Collection My Friend Is Struggling With.. Thoughts Of Suicide by Josh McDowell & Ed Stewart

For Professionals:

Suicide Prevention : Resources for the Millennium (Series in Death, Dying, and Bereavement) by David Lester (Editor)

The Harvard Medical School Guide to Suicide Assessment and Intervention by Douglas Jacobs (Editor)

For Everyone:

Night Falls Fast: Understanding Suicide by Kay Redfield Jamison

Suicide: Understanding and Responding: Harvard Medical School Perspectives, Harvard Medical School (available at Amazon.com)

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