

How to recognize suicide signs and what to do to help

At one time or another, every person finds life overwhelming. Some can't cope or can't find a solution to their emotions or troubles and fall into despair seeing suicide as the only way out. Before a person reaches this stage, however, there are often red flags. It's vital that these signs aren't ignored, overlooked or minimized by family, friends and loved ones.



A common struggle that can affect anyone

If you suspect someone you know is considering suicide, act quickly to get them professional support. There are many reasons that can cause someone to see suicide as the only solution to their problems and it may, at one time or another, happen to you, your family, friends, neighbours or colleagues.

What are the warning signs

Being aware of what signs to look for is a huge step in preventing suicide. You or your loved one may exhibit multiple signs or just one. Any indication should prompt you to get help immediately.



Common danger signs include:

- repeated expressions of hopelessness, helplessness, worthlessness or desperation
- behaviour that is out of character—e.g., someone who is normally careful acts recklessly
- symptoms of depression—sleeplessness, social withdrawal, loss of appetite, loss of interest in activity
- a sudden and unexpected change in someone suffering from anxiety or depression to an unusually cheerful attitude
- giving away prized possessions to friends and family; making a will, taking out insurance or other preparations for death
- making remarks related to death and dying or telling someone they intend to commit suicide, even in a joking manner
- tension, anxiety, nervousness, impulsiveness

How to help

If you're concerned about the possibility, but are unsure about your loved one's state of mind, break down the walls of silence and:

- Offer support.** Find a safe, private place to voice your concerns, speak to your loved one and better assess the situation.
- Be direct.** Talk openly about feelings and concerns and never make a promise to keep it a secret. It's important to find out information to pass on to a professional.
- Listen.** Be a non-judgmental voice. Don't tell your loved one not to think about suicide or minimize problems.
- Take protective steps.** Your loved one shouldn't be alone for the next few days or weeks. Help make contact with health professionals, family, friends and other organizations on your loved one's behalf.
- Draft a promise.** Have your loved one promise or even sign a contract stating that he or she won't hurt themselves before seeing a mental health professional. Call often and check on their progress.
- Remove all dangers.** Any prescription and non-prescription drugs or medication or firearms should be removed from their home and there shouldn't be access to any dangerous items.



A cry for help

Many people who consider or plan for suicide may not really want to die. They may simply see it as the only solution to end their pain and suffering. When your loved one exhibits warning signs, it's a cry for help. Take action by seeking support immediately.

Remember: if someone you know is considering suicide or has already created a suicide plan and you sense it's an emergency situation, act immediately and call emergency support lines including Crisis Services Canada at 1-833-456-4566.

