



nh healthy families.

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Suicide Risk and Prevention

What are Risk Factors?

Risk factors are influences that make it **more likely** that individuals will develop a mental health problem. They include biological, psychological, or social factors in the individual, family, or community. The more risk factors a person has, the more he/she is at risk for suicide and other self-destructive behaviors, such as substance abuse.

Individual Risk Factors Include:

- Mental health problems, including depression, bipolar disorder, and anxiety disorders
- Alcohol and other substance use problems
- Loss (due to death, relationship, job, or status)
- Poor impulse control
- Feelings of hopelessness, helplessness, powerlessness, or desperation
- History of trauma or abuse (e.g. physical, mental, or sexual)
- Prior suicide attempt (significantly increases risk)
- Fascination with death and violence
- History of bullying or interpersonal violence
- Confusion or conflict about sexual orientation/identity
- Compulsive, extreme perfectionism

Family Risk Factors Include:

- Family history of suicide
- Depressed and/or suicidal parents
- Alcoholic and/or drug-addicted parents
- Changes in family structure (e.g. death, divorce, remarriage, frequent moves/relocation)
- Financial difficulties

Community Risk Factors Include:

- Access to lethal means, e.g. firearms or other lethal means
- Stigma associated with help-seeking
- Lack of access to helping services
- Loss of family, friends, or idols to suicide
- Anniversary of someone else's suicide or other death
- Incarceration or loss of freedom; trouble with the law

What are Protective Factors?

Protective factors are influences that make it **less likely** that individuals will develop a mental health problem. They include biological, psychological, or social factors in the individual, family, or community. Protective factors help to lower the risk level of suicide and other self-destructive behaviors. These are strengths that we can develop and enhance for citizenry in our community.

Individual Protective Factors Include:

- Abstinence from alcohol and other drugs
- Help-seeking behavior
- Friends and supportive significant others
- Hope for the future
- Having goals
- Pets/Connectedness to others
- Good problem-solving skills
- Medical compliance and a sense of the importance of health and wellness

Family Protective Factors Include:

- Strong interpersonal bonds, especially with family and adults
- Family cohesion
- Parental presence at key times
- Cultural and religious beliefs that discourage suicide and support self-preservation
- Ability to cope and handle crises

Community Protective Factors Include:

- Reasonably safe, stable environment
- Effective care for mental and physical health and substance use problems
- Availability of counseling or trusted adult in the life of a youth
- Restricted access to firearms or other lethal means
- Opportunities to contribute/participation in school and/or the larger community

*This list of risk and protective factors was developed by the National Center for Suicide Prevention Training.

What are warning signs for suicide?

Warning signs are changes in a person's behaviors, feelings and beliefs about oneself that are out of character for that individual and place them at risk for suicide. How (or even if) individuals

display any warning signs is likely to be different from individual to individual. However, there are common traits that have been observed (either before or after the fact) in individuals who are contemplating suicide. Individuals who are displaying these warning signs should be asked directly if they are thinking of hurting or killing themselves and should be referred to a qualified physician or mental health practitioner for a full assessment.

Warning Signs for Suicide: Cause for Immediate Action

- Threatening to hurt or kill oneself or talking about wanting to hurt or kill oneself
- Looking for ways to kill oneself by seeking access to firearms, pills or other means
- Talking or writing about death, dying or suicide

Direct Statements of Suicidal Intent: Cause for Immediate Action

- “I’m going to end it all.”
- “I wish I were dead.”
- “I’ve decided to kill myself.”

Less Direct Statements of Suicidal Intent: Cause for Immediate Action

- “Everyone would be better off without me.”
- “Pretty soon you won’t have to worry about me.”
- “Who cares if I am dead anyway?”

Take Immediate Action:

- Call 911, or an ambulance, or get them to the emergency room
- Do not leave the person unattended, even briefly

Warning Signs for Suicide: Cause for Concern

- Feeling hopeless
- Feeling rage or uncontrollable anger or seeking revenge
- Feeling trapped—like there’s no way out
- Dramatic mood changes
- Seeing no reason for living or having no sense of purpose in life
- Acting reckless or engaging in risky activities—seemingly without thinking
- Increasing alcohol or drug use
- Withdrawing from friends, family, and society
- Feeling anxious or agitated; being unable to sleep, or sleeping all the time
- Sudden improvement in mood after being down or withdrawn

- Giving away favorite possessions

Connect with Help (Additional Supports) in the Community:

- Community mental health center
- Primary care provider
- School nurse/guidance counselor
- Pastoral counselor
- Other qualified professionals
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK (8255)

This list of warning signs is promoted by the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org).

Reference and taken from: <https://theconnectprogram.org/>