

The 10 Warning Signs of Suicide

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In a time when suicide has become a culture in society, it is important to be able to recognise the warning signs. Suicide is one of the leading causes of death in people aged 15 - 24 with young males four times more likely to succeed due to the lethal ways in which they choose to kill themselves.

1. Previous suicide attempts:

Previous suicide attempts are the biggest risk factor of a person successfully completing suicide. The more attempts the person makes, the more likely that he or she will eventually die by suicide. Often people say that people who attempt suicide are only looking for attention. This may be true but it is also true to say that the person is obviously in a state of pain and needs help and understanding. The reality is that suicidal behaviour is usually a last resort when the person feels that all else has failed. Normally, they are trying to resolve their inner pain rather than trying to manipulate those around them.

2. Recent suicide of a friend or relative:

Sometimes, when a close friend or relative dies by suicide, others adopt a copy-cat attitude and follow the deceased person's lead. It is not uncommon for suicide of a friend or relative to trigger attempts by friends or others.

3. Threats of suicide:

Many believe that people who talk about suicide won't actually do it. The reality is that, in the majority of cases, people have spoken of their intent before killing themselves. Often it may have been a single statement such as "Life's not worth living" or "I wish I were dead." Sometimes the person is preoccupied with death through a genre like music, art, or poetry.

Talking about suicide or exhibiting unusual interest in death through other themes generally means that the person is considering suicide as an option and that they really need and want some help.

4. Depression:

A lot of people use the word 'depression' to describe feelings of sadness and loss. These feelings often pass within a few hours or a few days. During this time, people are able to carry on much as usual. However, if you feel sad much more intensely and for longer and your feelings start to interfere with your work, social life and family life, you may need to seek professional advice. There are a

number of symptoms of depression and it's very rare for all symptoms to occur in one person all at once. You might feel it come on slowly, from sometimes feeling blue to deeper feelings more often. It is hard to accept that symptoms like sleeping badly or feeling worthless are depression. After all, don't we all feel that way sometimes?

That's the key - sometimes. It's not normal to feel that way for a long time. For some people, the feelings of hopelessness and despair that accompany depression are more than they are equipped to cope with and, as a result of this lack of coping skills, some take the option of suicide.

5. Changes in personality or behaviour:

There may be changes in the person's behaviour including withdrawal, loss of interest in personal care and appearance, angry outbursts, and absenteeism from work or school. Their performance at work or school will often decline as well.

6. Increased use of drugs and/or alcohol:

People who have difficulty in coping with problems will sometimes turn to substances such as alcohol or illicit and prescription drugs for relief. Abuse of these substances tends to lower inhibitions leading to an increase in risk-taking behaviour. Drug and alcohol abuse is often linked to suicide.

7. Behavioural disturbances:

Behavioural disturbances such as anger, aggression, stealing, impulsive behaviours, isolation, and drug and alcohol abuse can be a sign of increased suicide risk. Sometimes, people who are particularly vulnerable may act out their feelings in a potentially destructive manner.

8. Psychiatric illness:

In some illnesses such as schizophrenia, it is not uncommon to hear voices. This can be a contributing factor in suicide if these voices are telling the person to take their own life even if that person does not want to die.

9. Preparation for death:

Preparation for death often includes such things as making a will, saying goodbye to people, apologising for past misdemeanours, and giving away their possessions, particularly their favourite things. They may also acquire the means to kill themselves such as a gun, rope, or pills.

10. A sudden lift in spirits:

If a person has a sudden lift in spirits, particularly after depression, it is often a significant factor. It can mean that the person is relieved because he or she has made a definite decision to take his or her life and that the problems and their resultant unhappiness will soon be ended. They will often have more energy at this point to end their life.

Although not everyone displays these warning behaviours, a large percentage of people do display some of them. Encouraging the person to talk about their feelings, including their intended suicide, can be just what they need. No matter how uncomfortable you feel about the subject, it is important not to judge. A listening ear can make all the difference.