

How to Help a Loved One in a Mental Health Crisis

Common Mental Disorder Misconceptions:

1. Mental disorders are a sign of a personality or character flaw.
MYTH: This belief is inaccurate and hurtful.
2. If you ignore the problem it will go away.
MYTH: Ignoring the problem typically makes it worse.
3. Mental disorders are a sign of weakness. If someone wants to be happy, they simply just need willpower to be happy.
MYTH: Depression and other major mental disorders have nothing to do with lack of willpower or laziness.
4. People with mental disorders are violent.
MYTH: People with a mental disorder are no more likely than the general population to act out in violence.
5. "Healthy" people aren't affected by traumatic events.
MYTH: Trauma can affect anyone, no matter how strong or psychologically healthy they are.
6. If you ask someone if they are contemplating suicide you'll put the idea into their mind.
MYTH: It is important to directly ask the person about suicidal thoughts. If you appear confident in the situation of a potential crisis, it will be reassuring for the suicidal person.
7. Someone who talks about suicide isn't really serious about it.
MYTH: Talking about suicide may be a way for the person to indicate how much pain they are in. Your response to them will determine whether they trust you to share more. It's up to you to listen, stay calm, ask more questions, persuade them to seek help, and ultimately refer them to someone for that help.

Warning Signs of Suicide

- Talking or writing about death, dying or suicide
- Looking for ways to kill themselves (seeking pills, weapons, or other means)
- Expressing hopelessness
- Feeling anger or rage
- Acting recklessly or engaging in risky behaviors
- Increasing alcohol or drug use
- Threatening to hurt or kill themselves
- Feeling trapped, as if there is no way out
- Withdrawing from friends, family, or society
- Experiencing anxiety or agitation, unable to sleep, or sleeping all the time
- Undergoing dramatic changes in mood
- Feeling no reason for living, no sense of purpose in life

*This is only a small list of signs. People may show one or multiple signs. When in doubt, assume you need to have a conversation and ask the person.

If you have seen warning signs, engage the person in a discussion about your observations. If you suspect someone may be at risk of suicide, it is important to ask them directly if they are having suicidal thoughts without judgment or expressing apprehension. The more confident and calmly you are in your approach, the more likely the person will feel affirmed and respond honestly.

“Are you having thought of suicide?”

“Are you having thoughts of killing yourself?”

If the person responds, “Yes.” “I don’t want to burden you.” What’s the point of going on?” Your next question should be, “Do you have a plan?” “Have you decided how you would kill yourself?” “Have you decided when you would do it?”

A higher level of planning indicates a more serious risk. However, the absence of a plan is not enough to ensure the person’s safety. **All thoughts of suicide must be taken seriously.**

Stay with the person. Do not leave them. Call 988 (Suicide Crisis Line)

Do not use guilt and threats to prevent suicide. Talk calmly and advocate for seeking professional help. If the person isn’t willing to get help, you may need to call 911 if the situation warrants immediate intervention. If you can get them to agree, drive them yourself to an emergency room.

What to say when you arrive at the ER: “I’m having a psychological emergency”