

SUICIDE PREVENTION INFORMATION

Language Matters

Because suicide is already a touchy topic with a lot of stigma attached, it's important to talk about suicide with care. We don't need to berate anyone for using a "wrong" term. We may slip up ourselves! But it is always helpful to use the appropriate language whenever possible, and to gently educate others when the opportunity arises.

TERMS TO AVOID	WHY AVOID IT?	USE INSTEAD
Committed suicide	Comes from the days when suicide was a crime	Died by suicide
Failed suicide attempt	Implies that people who survive suicide are failures	Survived a suicide attempt Non-fatal suicide attempt
Successful suicide attempt	Implies that suicide is a good thing or something to try for	Died by suicide
Survivor	Unclear: survived their own attempt, or loss of a loved one?	Suicide attempt survivor Suicide loss survivor

Warning Signs of Suicide

The following are common warning signs of suicide:

- Talking about:
 - Wanting to die or kill oneself
 - Looking for a way to kill oneself
 - Feeling hopeless/no reason to live
 - Feeling trapped or being in unbearable pain
 - Being a burden to others
- Increasing the use of alcohol/drugs
- Acting anxious or agitated
- Behaving recklessly
- Sleeping too little or too much
- Withdrawing or feeling isolated
- Showing rage or talking about seeking revenge
- Displaying extreme mood swings
- Dealing with extreme emotional pain or personal crisis
- Giving away possessions

Asking the Tough Questions

If someone is displaying one or more of the warning signs for suicide, ask them directly if they are thinking about killing themselves. Try to use a calm, non-judgmental voice and keep eye contact. Remember, research has shown that asking someone if they are suicidal will NOT provoke them to kill themselves.

If someone discloses that they are thinking about suicide, don't panic. The next question to ask is if they've thought about how they would kill themselves. If so, try to remove the means for suicide (rope, knife, gun, pills, etc.). Explain that you care about them, and you want to keep them away from anything they could use to harm themselves while they are going through this very hard time in their lives. Practice asking questions like:

- "Are you thinking of killing yourself?"
- "Are you considering suicide?"
- "What is your plan?"
- "How would you die if you decided to?"

Listen, Listen, Listen

Let the person know that it's safe to talk to you about suicide. Ask what's going on that has them thinking about killing themselves, then just listen. Be empathetic rather than turning the conversation to yourself and your experiences. Remember, something that doesn't seem like a big deal to you can be extremely difficult for someone else to deal with. Just let this person get their emotions off their chest. Above all, don't judge them. It takes a lot of courage to talk about feeling suicidal, and feeling judged is a big reason why people keep those feelings inside.

Connect to Help

It's common for someone thinking about suicide to ask that you keep it a secret. Explain that suicide is a deadly secret, and they need plenty of support. Help them identify at least one other person to tell, and go with them to talk to the person, or help them make the phone call. You can also provide the person contact information for hotlines to reach out to. Dial Help is our U.P. wide crisis center, and can be reached by calling 906-482-HELP (906-482-4357), texting 35NEEDS (906-356-3337) or visiting DialHelp.org. The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline number is 800-273-TALK (800-273-8255). If they're nervous about contacting a crisis line, offer to sit with them while they do. If you feel that someone is in IMMEDIATE danger of killing themselves, take them to the hospital or contact the police for assistance.

Follow Up

Check in with the person in the days and weeks after they disclose they've been thinking about suicide. Let them know that you care and see how they're doing. Evidence has shown that such follow-up support can make a real difference in helping a suicidal person stay alive.

Special Considerations for Youth

Youth are particularly vulnerable to suicide due to major transitions and significant cognitive, mental, emotional, and social change. Suicide is the second leading cause of death among youth age 15-24. Approximately one out of every 15 high school students reports attempting suicide each year. For females, girls 10-14 have had the largest increase in suicide rates since 1999. If someone under the age of 18 discloses that they are suicidal, make sure to tell the youth's parent or guardian—unless doing so would put the young person in danger. In this case, contact Child Protective Services.

Sources: <http://www.speakingofsuicide.com/2013/04/13/language>
<http://www.samhsa.gov/suicide-prevention>
<http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/getinvolved/suicide-prevention-month-16.aspx>
<http://youth.gov/youth-topics/youth-suicide-prevention>
<http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/databriefs/db241.htm>

Compiled for Houghton/Keweenaw Communities That Care (CTC)