

Suicide

Let us start a conversation. . .

Spring is coming. Springtime is when the most suicides happen. Do you know what to say or do if someone is suicidal? You could save someone's life.

There is a very good chance that you have known someone who is suicidal or that you have been suicidal yourself. If someone is suicidal, do you know the telltale signs? Do you know what you could do to say that could save that life?

Have you ever thought of killing yourself? Most people would respond with an absolute no. Nevertheless, some of you, *without even knowing it*, likely thought about killing yourself!

Killing yourself is something you are not supposed to think about. When it comes to killing yourself, most think of the obvious: "I'm tired of living." "I have nothing to live for." "I'm tired of hurting "I have really screwed up, and now I am going to jail." "My mate has left me; I can never stand to be hurt this way again!" All these reactions are based on the belief that emotional pain is terminal!

Emotional Pain Is Not Terminal

Emotional pain can hurt like hell, but emotional pain will not kill you. You may kill yourself because of your fear and lack of a life purpose. Most people, at some time in their life, have experienced emotional pain so bad that they hurt physically. Going through intense emotional pain only proves how strong we are. "If I can go through that intensity of emotional pain, and come out the other side, then I must be a very strong person."

What kind of emotional pain are you in? Have you ever thought about driving off a mountain road and into space? Or, while driving on the freeway, have you ever fantasized about driving into a concrete bridge abutment? Or, as a teenager, have you been a "cutter?" Have you ever said, "I cannot live without her?" If you have done any of these, you have early signs of depression and suicidal thinking!

Surprisingly, these are suicidal thoughts of which you might not be aware. What results from driving off a cliff or into a bridge abutment? Many people are suicidal, and

they are not even aware of it. The Highway Patrol states that they estimate that 16% of fatal single-occupant crashes are suicide. Of course, if you're thinking about overdosing on pills, using a gun, or jumping off a bridge, you are suicidal.

Suicide is a lot more common than most people believe. "Suicide is a serious public health problem. Suicide rates increased by 30% between 2000–2018 and declined in 2019 and 2020. Suicide is a leading cause of death in the United States, with **45,979 deaths in 2020**. This is about one suicidal death every 11 minutes. Suicide was one of the three leading causes of death in the US for those between 10 and 24 years of age in 2020 and claimed nearly 46,000 lives that year—almost double the number of homicides." (Wikipedia)

"The highest rate of suicide is among people between 45 to 64 years of age. Suicide was the 10th leading cause of death in the United States for all races and sexes for 2016." Suicide Prevention Resource Center. The reasons for suicide can vary widely depending on the person's age. The importance of recognizing early that you are suicidal is that you can start looking at what is causing the depression and then do something about it.

The Light at the End of the Tunnel.

You need to help yourself before you help others. The first step for getting out of your depression and suicidal thoughts is to recognize and accept that you are depressed, suicidal, and need help.

The second step is to familiarize yourself with the warning signs of suicide. ([National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#)) The behaviors listed below are signs that someone is thinking about suicide.

❖ **Talking about:**

- ✓ Wanting to die.
- ✓ Great guilt or shame.
- ✓ Being a burden to others.
- ✓ Fear they cannot handle what is coming up for them, for example, divorce, prison, shame, humiliation, sickness, death, etc.

❖ **Feeling:**

- ✓ Empty, hopeless, trapped, or having no reason to live.
- ✓ Extremely sad, more anxious, agitated, or full of rage.
- ✓ Unbearable emotional or physical pain.

❖ **Change in the person's behavior, such as:**

- ✓ Making a plan or researching ways to die.
- ✓ Withdrawing from friends, saying goodbye, giving away important items, or making a will.
- ✓ Taking dangerous risks, such as driving extremely fast.

- ✓ Displaying extreme mood swings.
- ✓ Eating or sleeping more or sleeping less.
- ✓ Using drugs or alcohol more often.

If these warning signs apply to you or someone you know, get help as soon as possible, particularly if the behavior is new or has increased recently.

For those seeking support during a **mental health or emotional crisis, you may dial 988 to connect** to a nationwide support network. The transition to a simplified three-digit number is meant to increase access to the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline and will operate similarly to 911. Via the network, trained counselors at [more than 180 centers](#) will be available over the phone (988), text, or chat—users may call on their behalf or others.

Do not be afraid to ask if the person is considering killing themselves. If you ask someone if they're considering killing themselves, you are not giving the suicidal person the idea. Their response is more likely to be, "Wow, someone else can see the pain I am in."

Do not tell the suicidal person that you are going to help them! The smartest therapist in the world cannot change anyone other than themselves. If you suggest that you will help them, you set up an unrealistic expectation. And the suicidal person can start trusting you to change them rather than working on changing themselves. Once the suicidal person sees that you did not change them, they may turn their anger on you, and suddenly, you are in a homicidal situation.

If a person's view of himself is that of **not** having some control in his life, of not having some feelings of self-worth, of not being able to make decisions, of not being able to get and achieve the goals that he has set for his life, then there was really no reason to live.

The problem remains—how do we recognize a suicidal person from that manipulative, self-centered person who is just seeking his own way? The answer is that there is no clear-cut, one-hundred-percent accurate method of telling. But it is possible to create a list of clues to help you discern whether the person is suicidal or just manipulative. The clues are like any mystery we might face – the more clues we have pointing toward suicide, the stronger the indication that the person may be suicidal.

When I interview someone suspected to be potentially suicidal, I go through a checklist of warning points and determine how many indicators the client has. The more indicators, the stronger the indication that the person is suicidal.

I usually start with a straightforward question to the person about suicide. Most of the time, people skirt around using the word "killing yourself or discussing suicide. A person contemplating suicide often is relieved when it is out in the open and will express to you that these thoughts have been going on in his mind. Below are eight clues to look for in a suicidal person.

If the person tells me he is thinking about suicide, I will first ask, “What will you get out of the suicide? What will it do for you?” Suppose the person answers that it will make people sorry, that he will get even with somebody. In that case, it is not as strong an indication of suicide as if the person says he hurts so much or feels so terrible and helpless about life that he does not see any reason to continue to live.

Second, I will ask about their plans or equipment for killing themselves. A person who is suicidal has usually thought ahead enough to have either purchased equipment or has adequate plans by which he can kill himself.

Third, I look for possible losses that might have occurred in the person’s life to have brought him to such a desperate and hopeless state. Has there been a serious rejection, a death, or a serious health problem? One young lady I talked to, who was threatening suicide, faced going to court and listening to both of her parents, who had remarried other people, say that they no longer wanted her to live with them. For her, this double rejection was more than she could bear, and she was seriously suicidal.

A fourth question that is very important to ask is what plans the person has for the future. The manipulator, who is not very sophisticated, will often share his plans to be a carpenter or a truck driver when he grows up. He may talk about events to take place in the future, not realizing that a truly suicidal person has given up on the future and has no future plans whatsoever.

The fifth question is to ask the person what is happening in the world around him; what current events are happening; what things are happening on TV and the news, in the papers, and anything with which the person might have contact. The suicidal person has cut off the world and is no longer aware of the news in the community or what is happening around him. In his mind, his world has already come to an end. It does not matter what is going on. He has lost interest and no longer keeps track of current events.

The sixth piece of information I want (sometimes the person threatening suicide is not the person to get this from) is his history to see if there has been any sudden or dramatic change in his behavior. Is the person giving away possessions? Has there been a sudden decline in health? A recent trauma in the person’s life? Also, a drastic change toward isolation from a previously outgoing, extroversive behavior is a cue for suicide.

Seventh, I want to know about the person’s self-image. Is it negative? How does he feel about himself? What friends does he have? Who does he pal around with? Who are his partners and buddies?

Eighth, I look for signs of the person saying goodbye. Usually, this message is given to friends or relatives, and it may go like this: “If anything ever happens to me, will you take care of my dog for me? Okay?”

The ninth area is tricky because we sometimes become hardened towards a person who has attempted or threatened suicide many times before. A pattern of

suicide attempts is a cry for help, even though it may not always be a conscious attempt to get it. Even if it was originally a manipulative cry for help, a person who talks about killing himself can get to where he feels that there is no solution other than to really go through with it this time. Perhaps he initially found that people would listen to him, but later discovered that there was still no solution. By threatening and threatening and threatening, he finally gets to a place where he will conclude that there is really no hope, and this time it might as well be for real.

We must not respond to suicidal or potentially suicidal persons with, “If you’re going to kill yourself, go ahead and do it!” This only reinforces in their mind that nobody cares; they are worthless and have no value to themselves or anyone else.

In a crisis, there are several things that the person can do with the potential suicide that may help. Paraphrasing is a very important way of responding to a person who is suicidal. The fact that we listen and let him know that we are hearing him makes the person feel that he is important enough to be listened to. This increases his self-worth and gives him the feeling that there may be hope and a possibility of change.

In a crisis situation, it is helpful to talk to the person and suggest that if they kill themselves, they will never be able to see the changes or find the happiness they seek so desperately. And that, in a sense, they are losing any chance of finding peace and joy.

If the person’s attempt is to punish somebody with their own death, this also needs to be brought out, “Killing yourself will inevitably bring sadness for those around you, but these people will go on living, and they will find happiness.” “If you kill yourself, you will never be able to find the happiness that could be yours.”

Never promise to help a distraught or suicidal person. You cannot help them. They are the only ones who can help themselves. If they were to trust you to make their life better and you fail (and you will), you would have helped create an even deeper sense of despair and hopelessness.

Often, it is possible by reinterpreting events, by reinterpreting their situation, to change the meaning of what has happened to them--that there is hope and a reason to keep living. “Perhaps the fact that your girlfriend left says that she has a problem and can’t see what a neat guy you are. Would you want to live with someone who does not see you as a valuable, precious person?”

These are just a few ideas about suicide and the suicidal person. Again, no one solution will always work—there is no absolute way of recognizing a potentially suicidal person. The best we can do is to gather the evidence, give support and direction without trying to fix them, and get them professional help.

Myron Doc Downing, Ph.D.

Providing free Group Therapy through Meetup

Website: DocDPhD.com

Email: DocDowning103@gmail.com

