

Counselling &
Learning Support
North Vancouver Campus

Preventing Suicide:



Capilano University

BR 267

604-984-1744

www.capilanou.ca/student-life/support--wellness/health--counselling-services/



Preventing Suicide: What You Can Do To Help Yourself Or A Friend

Suicide can be a frightening topic. It is not an easy subject to discuss. Most of us hope we never have to think about it. Unfortunately, suicides do occur and you may know someone (maybe yourself) who is considering suicide. This handout is intended to help you to increase your awareness of suicide and suggest ways in which you can help someone who is thinking about suicide.

Who Is At Risk?

There are many reasons why someone may consider committing suicide. Usually people think about suicide because they are feeling greatly troubled and life feels unbearable to them. Ending their own life may seem like the only solution to ending the pain they are feeling. The acute distress they are experiencing makes it difficult for them to see other solutions, but alternative solutions do exist. The first step to offering solutions is to recognize who is at risk. The Canadian Mental Health Association suggests that people who may be at high risk for suicide are those who:

- Are having a serious physical or mental illness
- Are abusing alcohol or drugs
- Are experiencing a major loss, such as the death of a loved one, unemployment or divorce
- Are experiencing major changes in their life (e.g. teenagers and seniors), or
- Have made previous suicide threats

Each of these factors on its own does not necessarily mean that a person is going to attempt suicide. We all have different ways of coping with the difficulties in our life. A difficult situation that may seem manageable to one person may not feel that way to another. In determining whether a person is at high risk for suicide, it is very important to see the situation from his or her perspective. If he or she feels hopeless about finding a solution, suicide may seem like the only option. If you or someone you know is feeling desperate and helpless, it is important to know that help is available.

People from all walks of life have committed suicide. Suicide is not limited to particular social, economic or cultural groups. There is not a specific "type" of person who thinks about suicide. However, there are some similarities among people who attempt suicide. Dr. Edwin Schneidman, an expert on suicidal behaviours, identified 10 common characteristics of suicidal gestures. These characteristics are listed on the following page.

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The Search For A Solution

Suicide is not random. It is never done without a purpose. Suicide is seen as a way out of a problem, crisis or unbearable situation.

An Attempt To End Consciousness

There is both a movement away from pain and a movement to end consciousness. The aim of suicide is to stop awareness of a painful existence.

Unendurable Psychological Pain

Pain is what the suicidal person seeks to escape. Reduce the pain, and the person will usually choose to live.

Frustrated Psychological Needs

We all have needs for security, achievement, trust, and friendship. For the suicidal person, the needs may be "to be taken care of emotionally or physically" or there may be need for "order in the confusion".

Helplessness And Hopelessness

Shame, guilt, loss of effectiveness, frustrated dependency, and other feelings have been given as real causes for suicide. Mostly there is a sense of powerlessness and impotence, and feeling that no one can help with the pain.

Ambivalence

In a typical suicidal state, a person attempts to end life and cry out for help simultaneously. Both acts are genuine. This ambivalence gives the helper room to shift towards the life side.

Constriction Of Options

The suicidal person believes there are only two alternatives: a total solution or a total cessation. The dangerous word here is **ONLY**. A type of tunnel vision begins to happen. The goal of the helper is to broaden the person's perspective.

Departure/Escape

A desire to run away, to quit, to abandon it all. Suicide is a permanent escape. The helper must distinguish between the wish to get away and the need to end it all.

Communication Of Intent

In 80% of suicides, there were clues that pointed to suicidal intent. These may be **verbal** ("I am going away", "You won't see me anymore"), **behavioural**: (giving away prize possessions, eating/sleeping habits different from regular routine), or **situational** (traumatic events such as relationship breakup, death of a loved one, major illness). Essentially these are attempts to get others to see their pain and stop them from killing themselves.

Lifelong Coping Patterns

Previous episodes of disturbance. Previous ways of enduring psychological pain. "Either/Or" type of thinking. A particular style of problem solving (e.g. "cut & run").

***None of these characteristics are lethal by themselves,
but together they form a deadly combination.***

Source: Edwin Schneidman (1993)
Suicide as Psychache: A Clinical Approach to Self-Destructive Behaviour

Recognizing The Warning Signs

Approximately 80% of people who commit suicide give some clues about their intention prior to their death. These clues may be conveyed through things the person may say or things he or she might do. It is very important to pay attention to these signs. They are usually a "cry for help", a way to express a desperate need for assistance. According to SAFER (a counselling service for suicidal crises) and the Canadian Mental Health Association, some of the signs that may indicate that a person is considering suicide include:

- Direct or indirect statements about a desire for death or suicide ("*I don't know how much longer I can take this*", "*I wish I was dead*").
- Repeated expressions of hopelessness, helplessness, or desperation.
- Any sudden change in behaviour or mood (e.g. from being talkative and outgoing to being withdrawn).
- Signs of depression such as crying, sleep and appetite disturbances, social withdrawal, and/or loss of interest in usual activities.
- A history of previous suicide attempts.
- A sudden and unexpected change to a cheerful attitude.
- Finalizing affairs (e.g. giving away prized possessions or making a will).
- Saying goodbye to family and friends as if expecting to be going away.

How You Can Help Someone In Crisis

If you are concerned that a friend or family member may be suicidal, these are some ways in which you can help:

1. Most importantly, listen attentively and without judgement. Try to understand how he or she is feeling.
2. Talk openly about the topic of suicide. Do not be afraid to ask directly if he is thinking about suicide. Discussing the topic is the first step in helping, and, although it may be upsetting for you to hear about someone else's pain, it will provide relief for that person. It will also show him that someone cares.
3. Try to be non-judgemental. Acknowledge your own concern and fear if the person indicates that she is considering suicide, but do not suggest that she is overreacting or that "things aren't so bad". It is important to see it from their point of view, not your own.
4. Help the individual to explore alternative solutions to the problems he is facing. You may be able to generate ideas that he has not been able to see.
5. Get help. It may be difficult for you to provide help on your own. Encourage her to involve family and friends. Let her know that you are concerned and will help her to find resources. There are many people who can help.

Suicide prevention experts from UCLA have summarized the information to be conveyed to a suicidal person as follows: "***The suicidal crisis is temporary. Unbearable pain can be survived. Help is available. You are not alone.***"

How To Help Yourself If You Are In A Suicidal Crisis

Suicidal ideation is more common than most people think. The problem is that suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem.

There are other solutions. If you are in pain and considering suicide, it is important for you to talk to someone you trust. You might turn to someone in your family, a favourite instructor, or a family doctor. Or you might want to speak with a counsellor here at Capilano University.

We want to help. Counselling & Learning Support is located in Birch 267. You can just drop in or you can call 604.984.1744 to set up an appointment. Many people have felt suicidal during difficult times and they have survived. Your situation may seem hopeless right now but the pain will pass. We hope you will take the first step to helping yourself by reaching out to someone who can help. If you will do this and give yourself the time it takes for the fog to lift and the crisis to pass, you will be giving yourself the gift of life. Please take that first step.

Where To Go For Help

Capilano University Counselling & Learning Support

Birch 267

Phone: 604.984.1744

www.capilanou.ca/student-life/support--wellness/health--counselling-services/

Capilano University Health Services

Birch 249

Phone: 604.984.4964

24 Hour Crisis Line

1-800-SUICIDE (1.800.784.2433)

Connect to a BC Crisis Line 24 hours a day without a wait or a busy signal.

North Shore Adult Community Mental Health Services

Assessment & Treatment Services

#250 / 350 - 145 17th Street W, North Vancouver, BC V7M 3G4

Phone: 604.904.3540

Fax: 604.904.3542

SAFER (Suicide Attempt Counselling Service) (for Vancouver & Burnaby residents)

1669 East Broadway, 3rd Floor, Vancouver, BC V5N 1V9

Phone: 604.675.3985

Hospital Emergency Department

Lions Gate Hospital (or any other hospital)

Mental Health Information Line

1.800.661.2121

Vancouver: 604.669.7600

www.heretohelp.bc.ca

www.crisiscentre.bc.ca

www.befrienders.org