CPS Facts

SUICIDE

Suicide is a reaction to intense feelings of loneliness, worthlessness, hopelessness, or depression. Threats or attempts of suicide are calls for help. Knowing the warning signs and being prepared to answer these calls for help could prevent many suicides.

▼Why people commit suicide.

Problems that seem overwhelming may lead a person to think the only solution is to end his or her life. Suicide also can take place indirectly when a person's reaction to a problem leads him or her to act recklessly or ignore serious illness.

The following are some stressful situations that can trigger suicidal feelings:

- *Depression* – Depression is the leading cause of suicide. It can be caused by a personal loss, heredity, or a chemical imbalance in the body.
- *Crisis* – Major life changes, anger, humiliation, or frustration can lead a person to attempt suicide, sometimes before having had a chance to think it over.
- *Old age* – The changes wrought by old age can be frightening and may lead an older person to think of suicide an an alternative.
- *Substance abuse* – Substance abuse can weaken a person's self-control and lead to self-destructive behavior.

▼High risk groups.

While suicide knows no social or cultural boundaries, members of some groups are more prone to attempt or commit suicide than others. *You do not have to have a mental illness to have suicidal feelings.*

The following are considered high-risk groups:

- *The elderly* – Feelings of loneliness, loss of friends or spouse, loss of income and independence, and declining health often make older persons consider suicide as an alternative.
- *Young adults and college students* – Burdened with independence and responsibility for the first time, pressured to succeed in college or on the job, and faced with a world they seemingly cannot change, many young adults are overwhelmed and see suicide as an escape.
- *Business people and professionals* – The pressures to succeed and disillusionment over unfulfilled dreams place business people and professionals at risk.
- *Native Americans* – Life on the reservation, with its high rates of unemployment and substance abuse, and an exclusion from society's mainstream have led to suicide rates on some reservations five times that of the general population.
- *Minorities and the poor* – Despair brought on by discrimination, poverty, unemployment, and a feeling of being trapped, are causes of suicide.
- *Children* – Depression brought on by child abuse or neglect and an inability to communicate feelings or ask for help has led children as young as five years of age to commit suicide.

▼Suicide among young people.

Suicide is one of the leading causes of death among people ages 15 to 24. Young people are especially susceptible to suicide because they can experience many of the same stresses that face adults, in addition to the pressures of growing up. However, young people usually lack the network of support many adults have or a perspective on life and experience in dealing with problems that come with age.

▼Warning signs.

Suicide is rarely a spur-of-the-moment decision and most people give warning signs that they are contemplating taking their own lives. Some warning signs are:

- *Threats or previous attempts* – People who threaten suicide must be taken seriously, even if they have no intention of carrying out the threat. A previous attempt may have generated the attention a person was needing – and needing that attention again, the person may attempt suicide again.

- *Depression* – Anyone suffering from severe and prolonged depression is at risk of attempting suicide.
- *Personality or behavioral changes* – Someone who has been depressed or troubled and suddenly is better or seems to have resolved their conflicts may have decided upon suicide as a solution. Insomnia, loss of weight or appetite, loss of sexual drive, and withdrawal are also warning signs.
- *Preparations for death* – Someone suddenly making out a will, putting their affairs in order, giving away personal possessions, or acquiring the means of committing suicide (buying a gun, stockpiling sleeping pills, etc.), is sending out a warning sign.

▼How you can help.

One of the misconceptions of suicide is that someone who has decided to take his or her life is beyond help. In most cases, the crisis period when a person is actually considering taking his or her life is limited. The person can be helped past this period.

Another misconception is that mentioning suicide may give the person the idea. If somone is showing warning signs of being suicidal, that person has already thought about it. Talking frankly about it can actually help prevent a person from acting on the idea.

Here are ways to help:

- *Give emotional support* — Don't challenge the person, but take him or her seriously and offer to help. Listen to what the person has to say. Try to explain that, with help, the problem can be overcome and that things can get better. *Stay with the person until help is available or until the crisis passes.*
- *Encourage positive action* Suggest steps the person can take to improve the situation. Help the person to stay busy, balancing both work and recreation. The recreation should include physical exercise that will help the person relax and sleep better. Suggest a change of pace or scenery to gain a new perspective.
- *Seek professional help*— This can be obtained from suicide prevention centers, physicians and mental health professionals, members of the clergy, community mental health centers, or school counselors.

▼What else to do?

People who attempt suicide also face the stigma attached to it by society. This stigma causes discrimination in employment, housing, health care, and in the ability to buy health insurance. By learning more about mental illness and the effectiveness of treatment, this discrimination can end, removing the stigma that acts as a barrier to successful treatment.

For more information, contact the nearest community mental health center or the Missouri Department of Mental Health, Division of Comprehensive Psychiatric Services
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