

## Take all talk of suicide very seriously

Supporting a friend through a suicidal crisis is scary. You don't have to do this alone.

### Call the Distress Centre or a suicide helpline:

- Crisis Services Canada – 1-833-456-4566 or text to 45645 (4pm – midnight EST)
- Kids Help phone – 1-800-668-6868 or text CONNECT to 686868
- Distress Centre – 403-266-4357 (Alberta)
- Mental Health Helpline – 1-877-303-2642 (Alberta)

### Worried about a friend?

Although it may be hard to imagine a friend wanting to die by suicide, for some people, at times, life may seem unbearable. Your friend may have lost hope of things changing and may wish to escape their pain at any cost.

There are often warning signs that a friend may be feeling suicidal. Your friend may make subtle statements like, "I just can't deal with everything, life is too hard" or "There's nothing I can do to make life better." More overt statements could include, "Life isn't worth living" or "Everyone would be better off without me."

A friend's behavior may give signs as well. Take notice if a friend starts giving away treasured belongings, talks of obtaining weapons, or starts writing morbidly about death or loss of hope.

Severe signs of depression are also important to recognize, such as extreme agitation, neglect of physical health, feelings of desperation, and dangerous behavior such as drinking excessively or mixing drugs and/or a sense of hopelessness.

### What to do if you suspect a friend may be suicidal.

- Don't assume the situation will take care of itself.
- Don't leave the person alone.
- Don't be sworn to secrecy.
- Don't challenge or dare.
- Don't argue or debate moral issues.

**Be willing to listen.** One of the most important things for people when they are in crisis is having someone listen and really hear what they are saying. Even if professional help is needed, your friend will be more willing to seek help if you have listened to him or her.

**Voice your concern.** Take the initiative to ask what is troubling your friend and attempt to overcome reluctance to talk about it. If you can't ask them if they are suicidal, find someone who can!

**Take it seriously.** Do not dismiss or undervalue what someone shares. Do not assume the situation will take care of itself. 75% of all people who die by suicide give some warning of their intentions to a friend or family member. All suicidal talk should be taken seriously.

**Ask if the person has a specific plan for dying by suicide and how far he or she has gone towards carrying it out.**

It is a myth that asking about suicide will cause a person to think about or act on suicidal intentions. Talking to someone about suicide has been shown to lower their immediate risk.

**Let them know you care.** Reassure your friend that he or she is not alone. Explain that although powerful, suicidal feelings are temporary. Problems can be solved. Depression can get better, but suicide is permanent.

**Ask about alternatives to suicide.** Let your friend know that depressed feelings can change. Explore solutions to their problems. Help your friend generate specific, definite plans (e.g., staying overnight with a friend, calling a parent, tomorrow we will go to the counseling center together).

**Get professional help.** Your friend opened up to you because they trust you and have confidence in you. Encourage them to trust your decision to involve a professional. They may be more likely to seek help if you provide support and accompany him or her to the counseling center. The Burman University counsellor is located in the Sakala Success Centre, lower level of the Administration Building. If it is after business hours, contact the campus security or the residence dean.

You may also take your friend to a local hospital emergency room. You may contact police for assistance. You can also call 911.

**Address your own needs.** Being in a helping role can be stressful, draining, and sometimes frustrating. Be sure that your own needs are being met. It may be useful to talk to someone or receive individual counseling to address your experience and reactions.

**Did you know?**

- 75% of people who die by suicide tell someone about it in advance.
- Sometimes those contemplating suicide talk as if they are saying goodbye or going away forever.
- Between 20 and 40% of people who kill themselves have previously attempted suicide.
- Although most depressed people are not suicidal, most suicidal people are depressed.
- Serious depression doesn't always look like obvious sadness. Often it is expressed as irritability, a loss of pleasure or withdrawal from activities that were once enjoyable.

If you have concerns about a suicidal friend and would like to discuss it with a counselor, please get in touch with the Sakala Success Centre.

**Did You Know:** Training opportunities are available the Burman Campus community to provide information, skills and resources related to mental health and wellness. If you are interested in participating in training, please contact the Sakala Success Centre.

*Please note: The information above is not intended as a substitute for contact with a mental health professional. It is provided as a means for visitors to this web page to obtain additional information on topics typically discussed in counseling. Inevitably, some of the information represents opinion. If you read information that raises concerns or questions, please come to the Sakala Success Centre.*

*Information was adapted from: Student Counseling Virtual Pamphlet Collection (<http://ccvillage.buffalo.edu/vpc.html>)*