



CIVIL CONVERSATIONS #6

SUICIDE PREVENTION

The most important factor in suicide prevention is learning how to recognize the warning signs of someone at risk. The signs and symptoms that suicidal individuals exhibit are often times identifiable and treatable. Learn to take the signs seriously and learn how to respond to them.

Know the Warning Signs

- Symptoms of depression – Take notice if the individual exhibits sadness, increased crying, a change in appetite, a change in sleeping patterns, thoughts or conversations about death, a loss of energy, and/or feelings of guilt, insignificance, or hopelessness.
- Loss of interest in activities – Many suicidal individuals lose interest in common activities, especially in activities they used to enjoy.
- Drug or alcohol abuse – Drugs and alcohol may exacerbate symptoms of depression and cloud an individual's judgment.
- Preoccupation with death or suicide – Take it seriously. Most suicidal individuals give some warning of their intentions to friends, family members, or co-workers.
- Making plans – Be especially concerned if the individual talks about a plan or a means of committing suicide. They may also begin to organize their affairs, which may include giving away valuables or making changes to their will.
- Previous suicide attempts – Individuals who have made previous attempts are extremely likely to make future attempts.

Know How to React to the Warning Signs

- Do not minimize their feelings This will only prevent them from opening up to you and increase their feelings of hopelessness and guilt. Demonstrate that you understand their feelings and that you care by providing support to them. Do not debate whether suicide is right or wrong. Do not lecture on the value of life and do not be judgmental.
- Reassure them that there is help Normalize their feelings and emphasize that they are treatable and that suicidal feelings are temporary. Be ready to suggest resources they can turn to such as the resources listed below.
- Try to determine if the individual has a means, a plan and/or a time in mind Use this information to determine if the individual is in immediate danger. If there is any indication they do have a plan, a means, or a time in mind, contact one of the listed resources immediately. This may include taking the individual to the emergency room at a hospital or calling 911.
- Always take thoughts of or plans for suicide seriously If a coworker shares that they have thoughts of suicide or depression, let the person know your overriding concern is to promote their welfare and you will use all means at your disposal to do so, including assisting them to make an

appointment with a local community mental health agency, a suicide prevention or crisis center, the employee assistance program, a family physician, or a private therapist as soon as possible. Do not keep it a secret. Share this information with your supervisor or contact CIVIL at (301) 402-4845.

If you are thinking about suicide, please tell someone. If you have thoughts or plans of suicide, contact someone who will understand and can assist you immediately. This is not a time to attempt to work things out alone. You need the understanding and support of others. Call 1-800- SUICIDE or contact one of the resources listed below.

Campus Resources

- Employee Assistance Program (EAP), (301) 496-3164, www.nih.gov/od/ors/ds/eap
- Confidential consultation services to help address difficult situations that may affect an employee.
- CIVIL, (301) 402-4845, <http://civil.nih.gov/>
- A team of experts that help to prevent workplace violence through policy development, education, assessment and response to violent, or potentially violent, incidents when they occur.
- Occupational Medical Services, (301) 496-4411, www.nih.gov/od/ors/ds/oms
- Medical services for occupational injuries, illnesses, and health promotion.
- Police Branch, Division of Public Safety, 911 for emergencies, (301) 496-5685, for non-emergencies www.nih.gov/od/ors/dps
- Work/Life Center, (301) 435-1619, <http://hr.od.nih.gov/workingatnih/worklife/default.htm>
- Guidance and advice on balancing the demands of work and life.

Resources Outside of NIH

- The National Hopeline Network, 1-800-SUICIDE.
- The Crisis Center calls are answered by trained counselors 24 hours a day, seven days a week. <http://www.hopeline.com/>
- The National Strategy for Suicide Prevention (NSSP) <http://www.mentalhealth.org/suicideprevention/>
- Montgomery County Hotline c/o Mental Health Association
- Suicide Prevention Hotline, (301) 738-2255, Open 24 hours a day/7 days a week
- 1000 Twinbrook Parkway, Rockville, MD 20851
- American Association of Suicidology (AAS), <http://www.suicidology.org/>

