

Suicide Risk Factors and Warning Signs

Suicide is a devastating act that can seem to have come from nowhere. While we can't accurately predict an attempt, it can be helpful to understand what might put a person at risk. It's also valuable to be able to recognize signs that might warn of a suicide attempt.

Risk factors: could make a suicide more likely.

Depression or other mental health illness

If several of the following conditions occur nearly every day for two weeks or more, it could indicate depression.

- Feeling hopeless, helpless, worthless, sad
- Loss of interest in life and things that would normally be enjoyable
- Changes in eating, sleeping patterns
- Tiredness, low energy
- Feeling anxious, irritable, restless
- Physical pain without a physical cause
- Drop in performance at work or school
- Trouble focusing or making decisions
- Not wanting to be around other people
- Thoughts of death or suicide

Other risk factors

- Alcohol and drug use
- A previous suicide attempt
- A family history of depression, suicide, abuse
- A major loss – a death, relationship, home
- An event that causes shame, guilt, disgrace
- Physical health problems
- Learning of someone else's suicidal behavior
- Easy access to the means to commit suicide
- Being impulsive or isolated

Warning signs: may indicate that an attempt is close.

- Direct threats to hurt or kill oneself
- Looking for a way to commit suicide – buying a gun or stockpiling pills, for example
- A focus on death – talking, writing, drawing or posting online about death or suicide, listening to music related to death, looking at websites that discuss suicide
- Having a plan for an attempt; generally, the more detailed the plan, the higher the risk
- Behaviors and moods associated with depression as described
- A change in personality or mood – including suddenly becoming very happy after being sad
- Neglect of appearance or cleanliness
- Doing risky or self-destructive things
- Giving away meaningful belongings
- Taking care of end-of-life affairs, such as making a will, or getting life insurance in order
- Saying goodbye to friends and loved ones

Take extra caution if a person exhibits one or more warning signs and also has one or more risk factors or appears intoxicated.

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline:

Call or text **988**, or chat at 988lifeline.org

This information is for educational purposes only. It's not medical/clinical advice. Always ask your doctor for appropriate examinations, treatment, testing and care recommendations.

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