



## Warning Signs

Most people who experience suicidal thoughts do not want to die but rather cannot see any other alternative to escape their pain and suffering. Every individual's mental, physical or emotional pain can fluctuate from manageable to overwhelming, at which point thoughts of suicide may first appear or previously manageable thoughts may be at risk of being acted upon. This is where warning signs can help. Warning signs are specific behaviors, actions and verbal cues that could indicate someone may be considering suicide.

Warning signs are similar to risk factors, in that their presence increases the likelihood of someone's thoughts of suicide turning into actions. However, they differ in that the presence of warning signs requires greater and more immediate attention and intervention due to their relationship with heightened and, at times, imminent risk.

Warning signs can be direct or indirect, verbal or behavioral indicators about a person's suicidal thoughts. They can be explicit or implicit; conscious or subconscious; or a combination. Because of the individuality of suicide, noticing these warning signs in some individuals can be quite difficult. For example, a person may present various and singular warning signs to a number of unconnected people, and subsequently, in isolation, a warning sign may go unnoticed.

The identification of warning signs can be broken down into physical changes in the

individual such as sleeping patterns or weight loss; behaviours such as withdrawal; and verbal statements. Common feelings that someone might express include feeling helpless and hopeless. Direct verbal cues are clear statements expressing suicidal thoughts, such as "I'm thinking about killing myself," while indirect verbal cues serve more as hints that things are not okay such as "Things will be better when I'm gone," "The pain will never stop unless I do something," or "I want to go to sleep and never wake up."

In addition, it is essential to be aware of triggers such as events that occur in the person's life that can potentially heighten the risk of suicidal thoughts being acted upon. Triggers can include such things as a relationship breakup, loss of job, becoming ill or any number of major life events. It is important to remember that while the meaning and impact of an event to one person may be menial, to another can be the final straw.

While there is no precise formula for determining that someone is considering or will act upon thoughts of suicide, we can all play our part in knowing what signs to look out for.

Following is a summary of some of the strongest indicators that a person might either directly or indirectly give others when they are feeling overwhelmed and suicidal risk is heightened. It is important

to note that a person may show one, some, or many of these signs.

- 🗣️ Talking about suicide or death
- 🗣️ Having a plan on how they would kill themselves – the more detailed the greater the risk
- 🗣️ Having previously attempted suicide
- 🗣️ Saying things such as "I wish I were dead", "I'm going to end it all", or, "What's the point of living?"
- 🗣️ Expressing feelings of hopelessness, worthlessness and disconnection "I'm useless"; "I can't do anything right"; "nobody cares about me anyway"
- 🗣️ Withdrawing from people or situations
- 🗣️ Giving away possessions
- 🗣️ Undertaking risky behaviours
- 🗣️ Behaving dramatically different than usual (can be positive or negative change)
- 🗣️ Increased use of alcohol or drugs
- 🗣️ Saying goodbye or writing a goodbye letter
- 🗣️ Heightened emotions such as depression, anger, or anxiety

In addition, events that occur in a person's life can dramatically increase the risk of suicide. These events can include:

- 🗣️ Loss of a loved one, friend or public figure to suicide
- 🗣️ Relationship breakdown
- 🗣️ Change in life circumstances i.e. loss of job, financial difficulties etc.
- 🗣️ Traumatic event
- 🗣️ Onset of an illness

*To learn more about Suicide and how you could help in the fight against suicide, contact TALK SUICIDE Support Service on 1800 008 255 to discuss tailoring a training package to suit your needs.*

TALK SUICIDE Support Service is an initiative of Suicide Prevention Pathways inc. (SPP) offering programs that educate, raise awareness and above all provide emotional and practical support to those at risk of suicide and their family and friends. For more information visit [spp.org.au](http://spp.org.au) or call us on 1800 008 255.

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## Important Things to Remember

- 🗣️ **The warning signs above are those that research has found to have strong links with the presence of suicidal thoughts**
- 🗣️ **Warning signs can be direct/indirect; verbal/nonverbal; conscious/subconscious**
- 🗣️ **An individual may give different signs to various people which can go unnoticed in isolation**
- 🗣️ **The more signs present the greater the potential risk**
- 🗣️ **Triggers are events that can tip people over the edge and can significantly increase risk**
- 🗣️ **Warning signs can be both negative and positive changes**
- 🗣️ **Knowing the warning signs can help to save someone's life**