



Suicide
Prevention
Pathways

TALK SUICIDE

Holidays & Suicide Awareness

For most of us, holidays such as Christmas, Easter and special days such as Father's Day or Mother's Day are a happy and joyous time when family and loved ones come together to celebrate and show appreciation. However, for others, it can bring about feelings of sadness, isolation and possibly heightened thoughts of suicide for various reasons.

Holiday periods can give rise to many emotions for all of us - both positive and negative. For some, the negatives outweigh the positives due to struggles with current issues, memories of the past, or sadness over loved ones lost. While these individuals may have adequate coping strategies do deal with these issues on an everyday basis, the holidays can compound issues and lead to overwhelming feelings of loss, isolation, pain and/or an inability to cope.

During these times, it is important that we keep an eye out for others who might be struggling and finding it difficult to cope. This can be as simple as letting your family and friends know that they can talk to you without judgement. In showing your support, it is important to be on the lookout for factors and signs that may suggest someone is considering suicide. In order to do this, you need to first understand what to look out for.

Risk and Protective Factors

Research into suicide has found people and groups most at risk tend to share certain characteristics, known as risk factors. These risk factors are thought to increase the likelihood of suicidal thoughts and behaviours*. For example, some high-risk groups include men, minority groups, those with mental health issues (particularly depression and anxiety), the poor, the isolated, and the unemployed. In addition, those with ready access to means or who have lost a family member or friend to suicide are also at heightened risk.

On the other hand, protective factors can be seen as the actions or efforts a person can take to reduce the negative impact of risk factors and reduce the likelihood of suicidal behaviour. Protective factors can be thought of as being at the opposite end of continuum to risk factors; such as those who are mentally healthy, well connected and supported.

*It is important to note that these are merely a guide to help us understand who may be at risk, as an individual may fit into many of these groups and yet not experience any suicidal thoughts or behaviours.

Warning Signs of Suicide

A person contemplating suicide will usually give some clues or warning signs to those around them that shows their distress. Being able to help someone and direct them to the necessary support begins with being able to recognise the warning signs and taking them seriously.

Following is a summary of some of the signs that a person might either directly or indirectly give others when they are in emotional pain and feeling overwhelmed. 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
- ☹️ 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 that life is meaningless or hopeless
- ☹️ 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

What can you do?

KNOW THE SIGNS Knowing what to look out for is the first step to being able to help

someone at risk of suicide. If someone you know is exhibiting some or all of the warning signs and/or an event has occurred in their life such as those listed above, they may be at risk of suicide.

ASK.

There exists a misconception that asking or talking about suicide will increase the risk of someone taking his or her life - however this is not the case. Asking about and talking about suicide can in fact reduce the risk by making someone feel less isolated by not having to deal with their thoughts alone. If you suspect that suicide may be a consideration for someone, do not be afraid to ask. It is important to ask clearly and directly, and in a manner that welcomes an honest answer to avoid misinterpretation, avoidance or making someone feel as though they will be judged if they answer yes. Asking them directly also tells them that you are willing to talk and listen without judgement, which in turn allows them to feel as though they can be open and honest with you.

BE PREPARED.

Most importantly, if you do ask the question, be prepared to hear a yes response. If you are not and you react badly, this can lead to a negative chain of events by which the person may stop talking to you and increase their feelings of shame and isolation.

LISTEN.

The best you can do is be there to listen. Simply starting a conversation by asking, "I'm worried about you, are you okay?" or, "I'm here to listen if you want to talk," can allow someone to share his or her pain and is the first step to reaching out for help.

ASSESS THE RISK.

Do they have a plan? Do they have the means? If the person is at high risk, you may need to contact Emergency Services (000) or visit your local Community Mental Health service, or the Emergency Department at your nearest hospital.

LISTEN SOME MORE AND CONNECT WITH OTHERS.

If the risk is lower, spend some time talking with them about their suicidal thoughts, as this alone can help to reduce their level of pain. Talk to them about options for support, remind them that people do care, and actively help them to link in with support services such as those listed below.

Finally, never promise not to tell anyone or make promises you can't keep; suicide is serious, the risk of which is best reduced by getting a person the help they need.

Important Things to Remember

No one is immune from experiencing thoughts of suicide

- **Suicide can be prevented**
- **All threats of suicide should be taken seriously**
- **Most people give signs of contemplating suicide**
- **Be open to asking clearly and directly about suicide – and be prepared for the answer (if you don't feel prepared for the answer, help the person at risk engage with people who can help)**
- **Do not promise to keep someone's thoughts of suicide a secret**
- **A suicide attempt is a risk factor for future attempts**
- **Asking about suicide does not increase the risk**
- **The simple act of talking and LISTENING can in itself reduce feelings of pain**
- **Talking and Time is the greatest Ally while isolation is the enemy.**
- **A person who is thinking about suicide should not be left alone.**

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 or call us on 1800 008 255.

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