



Know the signs

Guide for understanding and preventing suicide

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Did you know suicide is the tenth leading cause of death in the United States? ¹

What can you do to stay healthy? What if someone you care about threatens self-harm? What should you do if a co-worker seems sad?

¹ [Suicide](#). National Institute of Mental Health. Accessed February 2018.

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Understanding and helping

Know the signs

Many people who die by suicide give warning signs. Take these signs seriously. It could save a life. Here are some common signals that someone is thinking about suicide:

- Talking about wanting to die
- Looking for a way to kill oneself, like searching online or getting a gun
- Talking about feeling hopeless
- Withdrawing from family or friends
- Giving away prized possessions
- Putting affairs in order — like updating a will
- Taking risks
- Saying goodbye like he or she won't see you again

Risk factors

Some people are at a greater risk for suicide. Risk is affected by factors like race, money, family issues and more:

- Access to guns or pills
- Drug and alcohol use
- Previous suicide attempts
- Feeling alone
- Feeling angry
- Feeling like a burden
- Tolerance for violence or pain
- Chronic illness
- Money problems
- Family history of suicide

What can you do if someone appears suicidal?

It's hard to hurt. It's hard to see someone hurting. Professionals, like therapists, are trained to deal with suicide. But most people have no training and don't know what to do when someone threatens suicide or self harm. You don't have to fix the problem on your own.

Here are some tips to help:

- Ask the person if he or she is suicidal — this does not plant the idea of suicide and it opens up the conversation
- Take all threats seriously
- Call a suicide hotline to get advice
- Call us to get support
- Don't leave a suicidal person alone
- Call 911

How to talk to a suicidal person

- **Ask questions.** Ask the person if he or she is thinking about suicide or hurting themselves.
- **Encourage the person to get treatment.** Know it's not your job to take the place of a therapist.
- **Offer to help the person take steps to get support.** You can research treatment options or make calls.
- **Remove dangerous items.** If you can, try to remove things like knives, razors, guns or drugs from the person's home.
- **Do not make light of suicidal threats,** use guilt trips or dare the person to kill him or herself.





Taking care of you

What to do if you're thinking about suicide

- Promise not to do anything right now. Give yourself at least 24 hours. Thoughts and actions are two different things.
- Talk to someone right away.
- Avoid drugs and alcohol.
- Visit a friend or family member you trust.
- Avoid things that make you sad, like listening to sad music, reading old letters or looking at certain photos.
- Ask for help. Call us or a suicide hotline. You're not alone.

The riskiest time²

Believe it or not, someone is still at risk for suicide when he or she starts getting better. When starting a new medication or treatment, a person might feel good enough to begin planning suicide.

It's a myth that most people die by suicide during the holidays. Springtime, when the flowers come out and the sun is shining, is the time when suicide rates go up.

² Migala, Jessica. [Why Suicide Rates Spike in the Spring](#). Health. Accessed February 2018.

Staying healthy

Emotional well-being doesn't always come naturally. You may need to talk to a therapist or take medication. And lifestyle choices can make a difference too. Making healthy decisions can improve both your mental and physical health. Here are a few simple things you can try:

- **Face time** — Connect with people in person. Have lunch with a friend or join a local club.
- **Get off your computer** — Unplug one night a week.
- **Give back** — Volunteer your time. Feeling like you make a difference can help you feel better.
- **Get out in the sun** — Spending time with nature is good for your soul.
- **Exercise** — Working out is related to good mood.
- **Do things that make you happy** — No matter how small, do things that bring you joy.
- **Practice gratitude** — Take time to notice what's good in your life. It doesn't matter how small.





National resources

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

Call **1-800-273-TALK (8255)** to connect with free, confidential support 24/7. Or visit the [Suicide Prevention website](#) for information and resources.

American Association of Suicidology

Visit the [Suicidology website](#) or call **1-202-237-2280** for information on current research, prevention, ways to help a suicidal person and surviving suicide. A list of crisis centers is also included.

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

Visit the [American Foundation for Suicide Prevention website](#) or call **1-888-333-AFSP (2377)** for research, education and current statistics on suicide. The website offers links to other suicide and mental health sites.

Boys Town

Call the crisis hotline at **1-800-448-3000**. For information about services, visit the [Boys Town website](#). Boys Town is an organization that cares for troubled children — both boys and girls — and for families in crisis. Their hotline staff is trained to handle calls and questions about violence and suicide.

National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI)

NAMI's helpline at **1-800-950-NAMI** provides support, information and referrals. They can help people with mental health conditions, family and friends, providers and the public. Or you can connect with a crisis counselor 24/7 by **texting NAMI to 741-741**.

National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)

Visit [the NIMH website](#) to find information about mental health issues and suicide prevention.

National Library of Medicine

Visit the [National Library of Medicine website](#) and search "suicide" for suicide-related information and articles.

Suicide Awareness-Voices of Education (SAVE)

The [SAVE website](#) provides suicide education, facts and statistics on suicide and depression. It links to information on warning signs of suicide and the role a friend or family member can play in helping a suicidal person.

Mental Health First Aid

Do you want to learn more about stigma and how to respond to mental health problems? Similar to CPR and First Aid training, Mental Health First Aid helps people identify, understand and respond to mental health issues. You can find a local training at the [Mental Health First Aid website](#).

Crisis Text Line

Text CONNECT to 741741 to chat with a crisis counselor by text message.





We're here to help

Suicide is a tragic and complex public health problem. Sadly, the rates of suicide are growing. Some of the risk factors include life events, depression, substance use and a family history of abuse.

If you or someone you know is thinking about suicide, it's important to take action. Here are some resources and facts to help you deal with suicidal issues.

We can all do something about suicide. Learn about it, reach out and offer support.

Resource materials

Click an article title below to learn more on the topic.

Articles

- [Facts about suicide](#)
- [Understanding depression](#)
- [Breaking the cycle of depression](#)
- [Teenagers and depression](#)
- [What to do if someone appears suicidal](#)
- [If you are thinking about suicide](#)
- [Helping a suicidal coworker](#)
- [Dealing with the death of a colleague](#)
- [Understanding loss from suicide](#)
- [Grief after suicide](#)



We're here for you

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Information is not a substitute for diagnosis or treatment by a professional and is not meant to replace the advice of a professional. Please note that there may be many other explanations for any or all of the above delineated behaviors. This information is not intended to be an exhaustive list of all signs concerning warning sign of depression, anxiety or suicide and should not be used as a stand-alone instrument. Information is not a substitute for diagnosis or treatment by a professional. Contact a professional with any questions or concerns about specific health care needs. This material is for informational purposes only. It contains only a partial, general description of programs and services and does not constitute a contract. Information is believed to be accurate as of the production date; however, it is subject to change. For more information about Aetna plans, refer to [aetna.com](https://www.aetna.com).

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