



Employee NEWSLETTER

Employee Assistance Program
September 2019

Suicide Prevention & Support

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Earlier this year, we presented articles on depression, anxiety, and the stigma associated with mental illness. This month, we address how these issues fuel suicidal thoughts and behavior, prevent people from getting treatment, and what you can do to help.

According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), every day 129 people take their own lives—over 147,000 per year. In more than half the deaths, firearms were used. Suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death for Americans between age 15-34, and middle aged white men die by suicide at the highest rate. Veterans are also vulnerable and die 1.5 times more often than non-veterans by way of suicide. Men were 3.5 times more likely to die in an attempt than women, though women attempted at a rate of 1.4 times more than men.

The causes of suicide are complex, but the common denominator is mental illness. It is estimated that 90% of those who died by suicide had a diagnosable mental health condition, and nearly 75% told someone first. Given this, it is crucial that we begin to have open empathetic conversations in order to guide someone suffering to mental health treatment and prevent suicide.

Suicidal people are not “just looking for attention”, but are in genuine distress. Medical issues like chronic pain, serious and terminal illnesses, and traumatic brain injury can contribute to feelings of helplessness and hopelessness, as can stress, relationship and family crises, and financial hardship. And, for those already experiencing depression or another mental health condition, someone else’s suicide can trigger a belief that this could be a viable way to end their own pain.

After Robin Williams’ suicide in 2014, the suicide rate increased by 10% with 2,000 more deaths in the months following. And a family history of suicide can contribute to the risk of acting on suicidal thoughts.

Knowing that these issues can make people vulnerable can heighten your awareness that suicide may be on someone’s mind. These warning signs associated with suicidal behavior can also help clue you in that someone may be in danger.

Warning signs of suicide

- An increase in substance (alcohol or drug) use, misuse, or abuse
- Feelings of guilt, hurt, shame, and despair
- Statements of not wanting to live
- Thoughts of dying or threatening to kill oneself
- Feelings of hopelessness
- Withdrawal from friends and increased social isolation
- Dramatic changes in mood
- Sudden improvement in mood can result if someone has decided to complete suicide
- Giving away prized possessions, pets, family heirlooms, cars etc.

How to help someone else

People with suicidal behaviors often reach out for help indirectly. Listen for their subtle cues and extend an empathetic invitation for the person to express and process the thoughts and feelings that are causing the distress.

- **Be direct**—Ask the person, “Are you okay?”, “Are you thinking about killing yourself?”, “How long have you been thinking about suicide?”

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- **Ask if the person has a plan**—If so, get specific information about the plan, including if he/she has the means to carry it out. Help remove the means. This is an important safety measure for a person during a short term crisis who may act impulsively.
- **Actively listen**—Listen carefully to find out what the person is thinking and feeling. Acknowledge and empathize as you hear the person's painful experiences.
- **Encourage him/her to seek help as soon as possible**—If the person is seeing a mental health professional, recommend that he/she contact this professional immediately. If not, provide the 24/7 phone number for the National Suicide Prevention Line 800-273-TALK (8255), or the National Crisis Text Line: 741741. For those with First Choice Health EAP, you can call the EAP 24/7 for support and resources at 800-777-4114. It will be imperative that the person get connected with ongoing counseling to deal with the underlying issues causing the crisis.
- **Connect with other people**—Avoid being alone. Solitude can increase feelings of despair and make suicidal thoughts worse. Reach out to a professional, a family member, or friend you trust. Talk to someone. Let that person know what is going on with you.
- **Eliminate lethal means**—If you have thoughts about suicide and have access to firearms, medications, or razor blades, get rid of them; lock them up or ask someone to take them away for you.
- **Avoid alcohol and drugs**—These substances increase feelings of depression and anxiety and remove inhibitions that can make you act impulsively—this can be a deadly combination.
- **Create a safety plan**—It's helpful to have an accessible plan with written steps for how to keep yourself safe. Remind yourself of activities that calm and comfort you, and include contact numbers for your therapist, doctor, family, friends, and suicide prevention hotline or EAP. Share this plan with a family member or friend for extra support in reminding you of what can keep you safe.

How to help yourself

The truth is, as humans all of us have experienced difficult situations and emotionally challenging times in our lives and suicidal thoughts are not uncommon. If you find yourself in this situation:

- **Get professional help**—Call the National Suicide Prevention Line 800-273-TALK (8255), or the National Crisis Text Line: 741741, for in the moment support. For those with First Choice Health EAP, you can call the EAP 24/7 for telephonic support and a counseling referral and other resources at 800-777-4114. You can also speak with your primary care provider for help. With a professional's support, you can learn ways to manage stress and troubling thoughts and emotions in a healthy way, and to recognize triggers and warning signs to prevent the situation from feeling overwhelming and insurmountable.

Remember that suicidal behavior is not a sign of weakness. People who consider suicide are overwhelmed with feelings of hopelessness, despair, and helplessness regarding their current life circumstances. Many different factors contribute to people feeling like suicide will stop their suffering. By empathetically listening and learning about the warning signs for suicidal behaviors, you can be an advocate of change for someone who needs your help.

For more information on suicidal behaviors, interventions, and prevention you can visit the EAP website at www.firstchoicееap.com or call us at 800-777-4114. We are here for you 24/7.

References

afsp.org/about-suicide/suicide-statistics

www.cnn.com/2018/02/07/health/robin-williams-suicide-increase-study/index.html

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