



SUICIDE IS NOT PAINLESS

If someone you know has threatened or made any attempt at suicide, it is vital that you get help as soon as possible. Look in your telephone book under crisis intervention, suicide prevention or mental health services for a hotline. Other local resources are hospitals, a family doctor, close relative or school guidance counselor. You can call 281-2273 or 578-3232 to talk to someone 24 hours a day.

Suicide Is Not Easy To Understand Or Talk About

Not even experts agree on the causes, warning signs or the number of people who die by suicide. One thing is clear: suicide is a real and serious threat for young people. It is one of the leading causes of death among teens and young adults. There is a positive side to the problem - most seriously depressed people can be helped and many suicides can be prevented.

Suicide Is Not Romantic

While there are many "Romeo and Juliet" stories in which young lovers die for love, in real life there is nothing poetic about suicide. Most suicidal people feel alienated, alone, desperate, depressed and hopeless.

Suicide Is Not a Dirty Word

Suicide has often been cloaked in shame, viewed as a sin or crime and mentioned only in whispers. Today most people realize that it is a problem that has to be brought out into the open. Someone who thinks about suicide is not crazy, bad or weird - but deeply troubled and may temporarily lack the skills and perspective to cope with life.

Suicide Is Not Always Predictable

There are many lists of "warning signs" for suicide, but it's important to remember that no one can predict suicide accurately. Sometimes severely depressed individuals can hide or mask their feelings. And happy people who are not at all suicidal can display one or more of these signs. There are two signs that always call for immediate professional help:

- 1) Threats of suicide or hints such as "I'm no good to anyone" "I cause trouble for everybody" "Nothing matters anyway" or "I won't be around to bother you much longer" are *always* serious.
- 2) Any attempt at suicide, no matter how weak or half-hearted it seems.

Suicide Is Not a Game

Sometimes people dismiss a threat or suicide attempt because they feel that “It’s just a bid for attention,” or that the person is being overly dramatic, or just feeling sorry for himself. And many people assume that teens are carefree and enjoying the “best years of their lives.” These are dangerous misunderstandings. Many young people face very real problems ranging from drug addiction to sexual and physical abuse to alcoholic parents. All teens face the pressures and stresses of growing up and the tension of trying to fit in while defining their identities as individuals. All teens feel depressed and alone sometimes and some may be overwhelmed by these feelings.

Other possible signals include:

- 1) Sudden and drastic changes in behavior such as a sociable person becoming withdrawn, or a normally quiet person becoming very active.
- 2) Prolonged depression, not just a passing mood. Severe depression may be indicated by various combinations of the following symptoms:
 - a) changes in sleep patterns - either sleeping a great deal more than normal or having trouble sleeping
 - b) appetite changes, with weight loss or gain
 - c) withdrawal from family, friends and usual activities
 - d) unusual neglect of appearance
 - e) lack of concentration, restlessness
 - f) constant boredom
 - g) constant, general feeling of sadness

If you’re worried about a friend or unsure how serious the problem is, you can talk with a counselor or hotline about what has upset you. They can help you decide whether your friend needs help and can tell you where to find that help.

Suicide Is Not Hopeless

Many people have been helped by counseling and treatment to work through their problems, overcome severe depression and go on to live fulfilling lives.

What Can You Do?

The first and most important step is to recognize and accept your own limitations. You may set out to help someone close to you and discover that the problem is too serious or simply too emotionally upsetting for you to handle. That’s not a failure on your part nor something to be ashamed of. You can’t take the place of a professional counselor or therapist, and you can’t solve all of your friend’s problems.

You can, however, help your friend open up and talk about what's bothering him.

Do express your concern, but don't be judgmental. Don't act horrified or disgusted. Let your friend talk out negative feelings or thoughts. Don't feel you have to have the answers, just listen attentively. Keep him talking. If you suspect someone is serious about suicide, don't be afraid to ask direct questions, such as "Have you been thinking about suicide? Have you made any plans? Have you talked to anyone else about this?" Don't try to smooth over the problem ("It's not as bad as you think"). You will be tempted to emphasize the positive, but remember that a deeply depressed person has a very difficult time even recognizing anything positive. Let your friend know that she is not alone, and you are there to help. Do something concrete? Talk about helpful adults or a hotline that he could talk to. If you think your friend can't or won't seek help, make the call for him. It's *not* a betrayal of a friend's trust to seek help that can save a life. And if you feel awkward or foolish about talking to a counselor, you can call without giving your name.

What If It Happens To Someone You Care About?

When someone dies, it's normal for the survivors to feel grief, anger, helplessness and guilt. These feelings are even more intense when someone close to you dies by suicide. If someone you care about is a victim of suicide, you should remember that all your feelings are normal, but guilt can be very destructive. It's almost impossible not to think that there was something you should have done, but it's vital to understand that you are not responsible for the death in any way. Nothing you said or did caused the person's suicide, not even a terrible argument or a breakup between friends. Find a counselor to help you work through your feelings.