

## What can Family Members and Caregivers Do to Prevent Suicide?

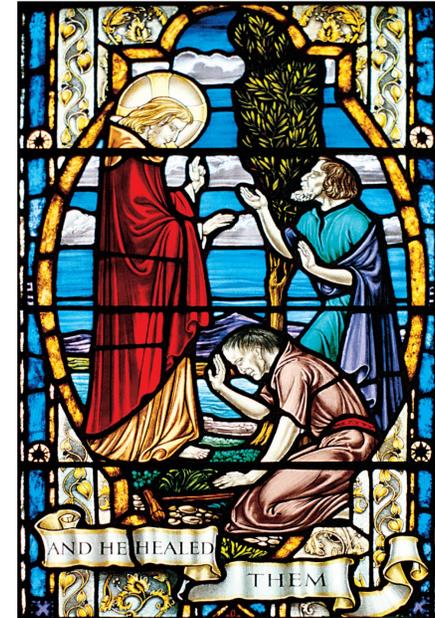
It can be frightening and intimidating when a loved one reveals or shows signs of suicidal thoughts. However, not taking thoughts of suicide seriously can have a devastating outcome. If you think your friend or family member will hurt him/herself or someone else, call 911 immediately. There are a few ways to approach this situation:

- Remove means such as guns, knives or stockpiled pills
- Calmly ask simple and direct questions, such as “Can I help you call your psychiatrist?” rather than, “Would you rather I call your psychiatrist, your therapist or your case manager?”
- Talk openly and honestly about suicide. Don’t be afraid to ask questions such as “Are you having thoughts of suicide?” or “Do you have a plan for how you would kill yourself?”
- If there are multiple people, have one person speak at a time
- Ask what you can do to help
- Don’t argue, threaten or raise your voice
- Don’t debate whether suicide is right or wrong
- If your loved one asks for something, provide it, as long as the request is safe and reasonable
- If you are nervous, try not to fidget or pace
- If your loved one is having hallucinations or delusions, be gentle and sympathetic, but do not get in an argument about whether the delusions or hallucinations are real

If you are concerned about suicide and don’t know what to do, call the **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK (8255)**. They have trained counselors available 24/7 to speak with either you or your loved one.

**Provide Support:** Even if your loved one isn’t in a moment of crisis, you need to provide support. Let he/she know they can talk with you about what they are going through. Actively and openly listen to what you are being told. Do not argue with any negative statements he/she may make, try providing positive reinforcement.

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## Wellness Words

December 2018

### Suicide Prevention and Awareness Month

“I have come that you may have life and have it more abundantly.”

John 10:10b

## Suicide Prevention and Awareness Month

www.nami.org

### Something to Think About

Suicidal thoughts, much like mental health conditions, can affect anyone regardless of age, gender or background. Suicide is often the result of an untreated mental health condition. Suicidal thoughts, although common, should not be considered normal and often indicate more serious issues.

Each year, more than 41,000 individuals die by suicide. In many cases, friends and families affected by a suicide loss (often called "suicide loss survivors") are left in the dark. Too often the feelings of shame and stigma prevent them from talking openly.



Suicide is the 10<sup>th</sup> leading cause of death among adults in the U.S. and the 2<sup>nd</sup> leading cause of death among people aged 10-24; these rates are increasing. Suicide risk is increased during the holiday season, possibly due to financial stress combined with emotional pain of loved ones not present.

Suicidal thoughts or behaviors are both damaging and dangerous and are therefore considered a psychiatric emergency. Someone experiencing these thoughts should seek immediate assistance from a health or mental health care provider.

### Know the Warning Signs

- Threats or comments about killing themselves, also known as suicidal ideation, can begin with seemingly harmless thoughts like "I wish I wasn't here" but can become more overt and dangerous
- Increased alcohol and drug use
- Aggressive behavior
- Social withdrawal from friends, family and the community
- Dramatic mood swings
- Talking, writing or thinking about death
- Impulsive or reckless behavior

### Is There Imminent Danger?

Any person exhibiting these behaviors should get care immediately:

- Putting their affairs in order and giving away their possessions
- Saying goodbye to friends and family
- Mood shifts from despair to calm
- Planning, possibly by looking around to buy, steal or borrow the tools they need to complete suicide, such as a firearm or prescription medication

If you are unsure, a licensed mental health professional can help assess risk.



### Risk Factors for Suicide

Research has found that about 90% of individuals who die by suicide experience mental illness. A number of other things may put a person at risk of suicide, including:

- **A family history of suicide.**
- **Substance abuse.** Drugs and alcohol can result in mental highs and lows that exacerbate suicidal thoughts.
- **Intoxication.** More than one in three people who die from suicide are found to be currently under the influence.
- **Access to firearms.**
- **A serious or chronic medical illness.**
- **Gender.** Although more women than men attempt suicide, men are four times more likely to die by suicide.
- **A history of trauma or abuse.**
- **Prolonged stress.**
- **Isolation.**
- **Age.** People under age 24 or above age 65 are at a higher risk for suicide.
- **A recent tragedy or loss.**
- **Agitation and sleep deprivation.**

