

Warning Signs of Suicide and What You Can Do to Save a Life

Here's an Easy-to-Remember Mnemonic for the Warning Signs of Suicide: **IS PATH WARM?**

I deation	Expressed or communicated ideation threatening to hurt or kill him/herself, or talking of wanting to hurt or kill him/herself; and/or looking for ways to kill him/herself by seeking access to firearms, available pills, or other means; and/or talking or writing about death, dying or suicide, when these actions are out of the ordinary.
S ubstance Abuse	Increased alcohol or drug use
P urposelessness	No reason for living; no sense of purpose in life, start giving things away because there's no purpose in keeping anything, no reason to maintain their hygiene
A nxiety	Anxiety, agitation, unable to sleep or sleeping all the time, difficulty concentrating
T rapped	Feeling trapped (like there's no way out and things will never get better)
H opelessness	Hopelessness, no future orientation
W ithdrawal	Withdrawal from friends, isolating from family and society
A nger	Rage, uncontrolled anger, seeking revenge, irritable
R ecklessness	Acting reckless or engaging in high risk activities, seemingly without thinking, impulsive behavior (especially in younger people)
M ood Change	Dramatic mood changes, flat affect, depressed mood, acting out of character

VERY IMPORTANT - All suicidal ideations are serious and every precaution needs to be taken, even if you believe the action is purely to gain attention. NEVER PUT A PERSON IN THE POSITION OF NEEDING TO PROVE THAT THEY ARE SERIOUS. Suicidal ideations are a cry for help. **DON'T AVOID THE TOPIC, TALK ABOUT THE FEELINGS AND DON'T BE AFRAID TO MENTION THE WORD "SUICIDE."** Most people will respond honestly. Many people are hesitant to bring up the subject of suicide for fear that they will be planting the idea in the mind of the person. This is a serious mistake! If the person is suicidal, asking them might lead to a conversation that could prevent the suicide.

Assessing the Degree of Risk – Mental health professionals should be used whenever possible, but once you suspect potential suicide, the best procedure is to approach the person in a **warm, accepting, non-judgmental manner** and ask a question similar to:

"Have you had thoughts of killing yourself?" or "Are you suicidal?"

Be careful with how you word your questions. Avoid asking questions that start with "why...". This elicits a defensive response and may cause the person to close down. For example, don't ask the person, "Why would you want to do something like that?" Instead ask, **"How would you harm yourself?"** This will let you quickly know if the person has a **suicide plan**.

Talking with a Suicidal Person

Do	Don't
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Voice concern• Ask if they are suicidal• Ask if they have a plan• Tell someone else• Remove access to lethal means (guns, pills)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Leave the person alone• Be sworn to secrecy• Tell them they shouldn't feel that way.• Act shocked• Argue or debate

Tips for asking if the person is suicidal

- ❖ If in doubt, don't wait, ask the question
- ❖ If the person is reluctant, be persistent
- ❖ Talk to the person alone in a private setting
- ❖ Allow the person to talk freely
- ❖ Give yourself plenty of time

- ❖ Have your resources handy; phone numbers, counselor's name and any other information that might help

Three steps to saving a life

1. Ask the question

The direct approach is the best approach. Here are some examples of how to ask the suicide question

- ❖ "You know, when people are as upset as you seem to be, they sometimes wish they were dead. I'm wondering if you're feeling that way, too?"
- ❖ "You look pretty miserable, are you thinking about suicide?"
- ❖ "Are you thinking about killing yourself?"

NOTE: If you cannot ask the question, find someone who can.

How NOT to ask the suicide question

- ❖ "You're not thinking of killing yourself, are you?"
- ❖ "You wouldn't do something stupid like kill yourself would you?"
- ❖ "Suicide is a dumb idea. You're not thinking about suicide are you?"

2. Provide hope

HOW TO PERSUADE SOMEONE TO STAY ALIVE

- ❖ Listen to the problem and give them your full attention
- ❖ Remember, suicide is not the problem, only the solution to a perceived insoluble problem
- ❖ Do not rush to judgment
- ❖ Offer hope in any form

Then Ask:

- ❖ "I don't want you to kill yourself, I want to help"
- ❖ "Will you go with me to get help?"
- ❖ "Will you let me get you some help?"
- ❖ "Will you promise me not to kill yourself until we've found some help?"

3. Take them directly to help

- ❖ Suicidal people often believe they cannot be helped, so you may have to do more.
- ❖ **The best referral involves taking the person directly to someone who can help (emergency room, behavioral health specialist, school counselor, health care professional, clergy, police). If none of the above is available, call 911 or the Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 800-273-8255. If the person is uncomfortable talking, they can also text the National Crisis Text Line by texting "MT" to 741 741.**
- ❖ The next best referral is getting a commitment from them to accept help, helping them make the arrangements to get that help, and **follow-up** with the person to make sure they know you want to help and are a support to them.

NOTE: NEVER leave a suicidal person alone.

NEVER agree to keep it a secret. Get others involved.

**For additional resources, please visit our website at
www.dphhs.mt.gov/amdd/suicide
or contact Karl Rosston at 406-444-3349 or krosston@mt.gov**