

# SUICIDE



*If you are thinking about suicide right now, please call 911.*

Suicide is the act of intentionally causing one's own death. Suicide occurs across all ages, incomes, ethnicities and social factors. Males die by suicide more approximately four times as often as females, but three times more women attempt suicide than men.

## WHY DO PEOPLE TURN TO SUICIDE?

Most often, people turn to suicide when they have lost hope and feel helpless. They want their pain to end, and they may see no other way out. Suicide can also be an impulsive act that follows the use of substances. In some cases, people with psychotic illnesses such as schizophrenia may hear voices that tell them to harm themselves.

Suicide can often be prevented. Many people who die by suicide have shown warning signs that they were thinking of killing themselves.

## WHO IS AT RISK?

People at a higher risk include those who:

- ✓ Have a serious mental health and/or addiction problem;
- ✓ Have had a recent major loss (for example, the death of a loved one or a business failure);
- ✓ Have a family history of suicide;
- ✓ Have made previous suicide attempts;
- ✓ Have a serious physical illness;
- ✓ Have impulsive behaviours;
- ✓ Lack support from family, friends, or community; and
- ✓ Have access to weapons, medications, or other legal means of suicide.



## CAN THE RISK BE REDUCED?

The risk for suicide may be reduced when “protective factors” are present. In general, protective factors help to increase a person’s resilience – the ability to “bounce back” in the face of stress and adversity. Examples include:

- ✓ Positive social supports;
- ✓ A sense of responsibility for others, such as having children in the home (except when the person has postpartum depression or psychosis) or having pets;
- ✓ Positive coping skills;
- ✓ A positive relationship with a medical or mental health provider; and
- ✓ Self-efficacy (a person’s belief in their ability to succeed in specific situations).

## HOW CAN YOU HELP?

-  *Listen to them and take them seriously.* Don’t judge or minimize their feelings. Be positive and hopeful, and remember that suicide can, in many cases, be prevented.
-  *Ask them if they are suicidal.* You will not put the idea of suicide in their head. It may be a relief for them to talk about it.
-  *Ask them if they have a plan.* Depending on their answer you may want to limit their access to lethal means, such as medication, knives, or firearms. Then, assess if they have the means to carry out their plan.
-  *Ask them to rate their suicidal feelings on a scale of 1 to 10.* Then regularly ask them to tell you where they are on the scale, so you can assess if things are getting worse.
-  *Let them know that help is available.* Assure them that the cause of their suicidal thoughts can be successfully treated.
-  *Encourage them to talk about how they are feeling.*



-  *Encourage them to seek help.* Let them know about services provided by doctors and/or mental health providers, and offer to help with this if they would like.
-  *Make a safety plan with them.* Who will they call if their feelings get stronger? Who can stay with them to keep them safe? Make a list of phone numbers of people and services they can call if they feel unsafe. Avoid leaving the person alone if they are in crisis and your own safety is not at risk.
-  *Seek support for yourself.* It is important that you don't carry this burden alone.

ADAPTED FROM "WHAT TO DO WHEN A FAMILY MEMBER IS SUICIDAL" © 2010 CENTRE FOR ADDICTION AND MENTAL HEALTH.