

Understanding and Preventing Suicide

Suicide defined as “the act of taking one’s own life voluntarily and intentionally”

1) Suicide facts in the US.

- a) Suicides account for 1.3% of all deaths (33,000 per year).
- b) Suicide attempts account for 400,000 self-inflicted injuries each year.
- c) As a cause of death suicide is:
 - i) 11th leading cause of death for all ages.
 - ii) 3rd cause of death for ages 10 to 24.
 - iii) 12th cause of death for age 60+ (but rate is highest at 15 per 100,000 population).
 - iv) 3rd leading cause of death for military.
- d) Men take their lives 4 times more than women and are 80% of all suicide deaths.
- e) Women attempt suicide 2 to 3 times more often than men.
- f) Child and youth suicide attempts greater than any other age group.
- g) Suicide rates from 1990 to 2003 were declining steadily. Beginning in 2004 the rate has increased annually.

2) Risk Factors

- a) Historical factors
 - i) Previous attempts
 - ii) Family history
 - iii) Exposure to suicide
- b) Current Factors
 - i) Mental health
 - (1) Conditions
 - (2) Start of prescription antidepressants – especially for young
 - ii) Substance abuse – drug and alcohol
 - iii) Relationship struggles and discord
 - iv) Loss of
 - (1) Loved one - through death or end of relationship
 - (2) Health
 - (3) Job / financial
 - (4) Roles
 - v) Disconnection and barriers to receiving help
 - vi) Precipitating events
 - vii) Access to lethal methods

3) Warning Signs

- a) Previous attempts
- b) Talking, writing or asking questions about suicide
- c) "Preparing for" suicide or death
- d) Preoccupation with death
- e) Mental health struggles
- f) Changes in usual behavior
 - i) Mood
 - ii) Eating or sleeping patterns
 - iii) Substance use / abuse
 - iv) Withdrawal
 - v) Difficult relationships

4) Prevention

a) Protective factors

- i) Family stability
- ii) Good coping and problem solving skills
- iii) Positive self image
- iv) Strong relationships
- v) Connected to community, school, work environment
- vi) Extracurricular and/or leisure activities
- vii) Faith
- viii) Access to support services / mental health professionals
- ix) Resiliency

b) Intervention

- i) Know the risk factors and warning signs
- ii) Educating people about suicide in a caring manner does not lead to or cause more suicidal behavior
- iii) Be bold – talk to a person about their feeling and ask if they are contemplating suicide. Ask this question
"Sometimes when people have had your experiences and feelings they have thoughts of suicide. Is this something that you are thinking about?"
- iv) Take immediate action.
 - (1) Assess the risk
 - (2) Consider precipitating events
 - (3) Past actions
 - (4) Any other factors
 - (5) Act immediately
- v) See attached handout on detailed intervention actions.
- vi) But remember - that often, if an individual is determined to take their own life – especially an adult, no one, no matter how skilled or vigilant can prevent them from making that choice.

5) Processing and coping after a suicide

- a) Guilt
- b) Anger
- c) Grief
- d) Questions

6) Panel discussion

7) Open question and answer period