



Understanding The Nature of Suicide Risks

By

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Suicide is the 10th most common cause of death in the United States and is one of the top three causes of death in people between the ages of 15 and 24. According to the National Institutes of Health, more than 39,000 people in the US commit suicide each year and more than 400,000 people with self-inflicted injuries are treated in emergency rooms each year. Men are about 4 times more likely than women to die from suicide, but women are about 3 times more likely to attempt suicide. These differences tend to occur because men frequently select more lethal means of self-harm (i.e. guns). Obviously, these numbers are alarming. Suicide, however, is a tragedy that can often be prevented.

Risk Factors for Suicide

One of the first steps to preventing suicide is to understand the risk factors associated with suicidal thoughts and actions. Some of the more common risk factors include:

- History of previous suicide attempts or self-harm.
- History of depression or bipolar disorder.
- History of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.
- Family history of suicide, especially of those family members that the individual felt close to.
- Recent loss (i.e. loss of job or significant relationship).
- History of alcohol or drug abuse.
- History of personality disorder (i.e. borderline personality).

- Significant physical illness.
- Significant history of childhood abuse, especially sexual abuse.
- Significant life stressors, such as financial stress or relationship problems.
- Recent suicide of a close friend or relative.

Learn to Recognize the Warning Signs

In general, most people think about suicide and dying a lot before they act on the thoughts. The exception to this tends to be teenagers who can be impulsive and reactionary to things around them. Even teenagers, however, often give warning signs about their distress. Some of the common warning signs are:

- Talking about suicide or not wanting to live.
- Expressing thoughts of hopelessness.
- Increase in self-harming behaviors.
- Isolating.
- Having trouble concentrating or thinking clearly.
- Giving away belongings or putting their "affairs in order."
- Recent loss in interest in activities that they used to enjoy.
- Investigating ways to die or arranging ways to commit suicide (i.e. stockpiling pills or buying a gun).
- Recent change in mood. (i.e. becoming suddenly calm and "at peace" after feeling de-

pressed and suicidal. This can indicate that they have made a decision to act on their suicidal thoughts.)

Recognize That Suicidal Thoughts Are a Symptom, Not A Solution

Suicidal Thoughts Are Not Normal, but they are typical if you are depressed. In fact, thoughts of dying are one of the significant symptoms of depression. The more depressed a person is, the more intense and frequent their thoughts of dying tend to be. As a result, an individual who is depressed might begin to ruminate about dying and begin to feel like their thoughts of suicide are a rational solution to the problems that they are facing. It is, therefore, important to help them realize that these thoughts are a symptom of depression (not a solution) and that this depression can be successfully treated.

Another source of suicidal thoughts tends to come from unresolved trauma and grief. For example, veterans of combat who have experienced traumatic events and loss may experience suicidal thoughts when they return home. In addition, survivors of childhood abuse may experience suicidal thoughts when the past traumas begin to re-emerge in adulthood. In both of these examples, the suicidal thoughts tend to emanate from the unresolved traumas. When the traumas get resolved, the thoughts of suicide tend to go away.

Psychotherapy Helps

Whether someone is dealing with depression, unresolved grief or trauma, or other mental health issues, psychotherapy can help. Psychotherapy can help an individual develop the coping skills they need to resolve the underlying issues that are causing the suicidal thoughts.

New Dimensions Can Help If You or Someone You Know Is:

- Depressed or Suicidal
- Stuck and having difficulty making changes
- Dealing with trauma
- Having Panic Attacks
- Having difficulty working or going to school
- Struggling with addictions or substance abuse
- Cutting or doing other self-destructive behaviors
- Struggling with anger issues
- Struggling to get medications stabilized

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If Someone You Know is Struggling with Suicidal Thoughts Get Them Help!

Suicidal thoughts do not have to end in suicide. When someone is struggling with suicidal thoughts they frequently can't see any other way to end the pain than to die. They may begin to ruminate about dying and begin to feel like they have "tried everything" to feel better. Unfortunately, they often don't recognize that there is a way out of the mental loop of depression, hopelessness, and suicidal thoughts. As a result, it is often necessary to intervene when someone is spiraling down into despair. Don't be afraid to get someone help if you are concerned about their safety.



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The Woodlands Location:

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Tools to Help Protect You Against Suicidal Thoughts

1. **Combat Suicidal Thoughts by Re-Establishing Hope** - Suicide is often described as a permanent solution to a temporary problem. When someone is contemplating suicide they often see death as the only way out of their problems. Hope, on the other hand, is often the antidote for suicidal thoughts. Hope keeps us going in challenging times and helps us “see the light at the end of the tunnel”. The more we help someone re-establish hope in their lives the more resistant they tend to be to suicidal impulses.
2. **Build Resiliency By Building Coping Skills** - The more coping skills that we have, the better we tend to manage the challenges of life. If someone is suicidal, help them find the resources that are available to help them get through their current crisis. When the crisis passes, psychotherapy can help them build resiliency by helping them learn the skills they need to cope with depression, anxiety, grief and other life stressors.
3. **Develop Strong Social Ties** - The stronger our social ties the more support we have during times of stress and crisis. It is important to build strong relationships and social ties during the “normal” times, so that you have the social support safety net when you need it most.
4. **Get Sober** - Alcohol and drug abuse is one of the risk factors of suicides. If you are struggling with addictions, get the help you need to get sober and stay sober. It could save your life.
5. **Develop Your Spiritual Life** - A strong sense of connection to things greater than ourselves is often an important aspect of finding meaning in life. A strong spiritual life can help you overcome the dark times in life.
6. **Get Support and Treatment for Health Issues** - Our physical health matters. Our physical health often affects our quality of life and the higher the quality of life, the more resistant we are to suicidal thoughts.
7. **Seek Therapy** - Psychotherapy Helps. Get help when you need it and don't let fear stop you from working through past emotional baggage that may be preventing you from having the life that you want.

Suicide Risks and Teenagers

Life can be challenging for teenagers. Their brains are still developing, their bodies are changing, and their hormones are fluctuating. During this stage of life, teenagers struggle to establish meaningful relationships outside of the family and try to find the group of friends where they “fit in”. They also begin to test limits and frequently push back against authority in an attempt to separate from their family of origin and define their own identity. Some teenagers manage this time fairly well, but others can end up feeling lost, alone, angry, or depressed.

Because teenagers are impulsive and have under-developed coping skills, they can become acutely suicidal very quickly. Teenagers are at greater risk

than adults to act out on their suicidal thoughts without giving much warning. As a result, it is important to recognize some of the risk factors associated with teenage suicide. These include:

- Depression
- Recent break-up or perceived rejection by peer group.
- Victim of bullying or cyber-bullying.
- Past sexual abuse or severe physical abuse.
- Cutting or other self-harming behaviors
- Alcohol and Drug Use
- Recent suicide by a friend or another student at school.
- Feeling desperate or hopeless.

Helpful Responses To Distressed Teenagers

- Take verbalization of suicidal thoughts seriously.
- Address issues around bullying. Realize that bullying tends to isolate teenagers and can be a vicious attack on their self-esteem. As a result, teenagers need a lot of support when they are trying to overcome bullying.
- Help your teenager develop supportive peer groups.
- Keep pills and weapons locked up.
- Encourage your teenager to talk about their thoughts, feelings, and experiences.
- Get them help.



Risk of Suicide Contagion

A suicide at school by a teenager may make other teenagers at that school more likely to act on their own suicidal impulses. Teenagers that are most at risk are those that 1) witnessed the suicide or its aftermath, 2) had a social or emotional connection to the deceased teenager, and 3) are already “at risk” due to struggles with depression or other mental health issues. As a result, it is important to give teenagers a lot of opportunity to talk through their feelings about any recent suicides that may occur at their school.