



Education

Suicide

What is suicide?

Suicide is the act of intentionally taking one's own life.

Suicide is one of the leading causes of death in the US. Women purposely injure themselves 3 to 4 times more often than men. However, men are 3 times more likely to kill themselves than are women.

Those at higher risk for committing suicide:

- have attempted suicide before
- live alone
- are not married
- have chronic pain or a terminal illness
- are alcoholics or drug abusers
- have a family history of suicide
- are depressed
- have little or no social support
- have recently lost a loved one
- are gay or bisexual
- have a mental illness
- are unemployed.

The group with the highest risk for suicide is white males over the age of 65. An older adult who attempts suicide is much more likely to be successful than a younger person.

Why do people commit suicide?

Most people who attempt suicide have a mental illness such as depression, schizophrenia, or bipolar disorder. They may also have problems with alcohol or drug abuse. Often a person who tries suicide feels hopeless, helpless, grief, or a sense of loss.

Feeling hopeless and helpless may be caused by:

- having a serious illness such as cancer, heart failure, or chronic lung disease
- being in constant pain
- being under financial strain
- mourning the death of a spouse, child, or sibling
- changing lifestyle or roles due to retirement
- having fewer social supports.

What are the methods used?

The most common method used to commit suicide is poisoning, usually from an overdose of sleeping pills, sometimes taken with alcohol. Inhaling car exhaust fumes is another method often used. Men are more likely than women to use a violent method such as shooting themselves.

How can I help prevent a suicide from occurring?

Someone may be thinking seriously of suicide if he or she:

- talks or jokes about suicide or writes a suicide note
- writes a will
- acts depressed (sad, crying)
- abuses drugs or alcohol
- gives away prized possessions or throws away important belongings
- thinks about death all the time
- neglects or changes his or her appearance for the worse
- changes eating and sleeping habits
- withdraws from friends, family, and regular activities
- lets the quality of his or her work go down
- becomes very moody, irritable, violent, rebellious, or withdrawn
- knows how and where he or she would commit suicide.

Often a person gives clues that he or she is going to commit suicide. Most people do NOT hurt themselves or fake suicide just to get attention. Talking about suicide is a cry for help. If someone ever tells you he or she is planning to commit suicide, take it seriously.

Suicide is preventable in many cases. Do not be afraid to ask if someone is thinking of suicide. You are not putting ideas in his or her head. Encourage them to tell you what they are feeling. Show that you take their feelings very seriously. It can be a relief for someone thinking of suicide to talk about it.

If you think someone is suicidal, get help immediately. Remove or lock up lethal weapons, such as guns, pills, and ropes. Do not leave the person alone. Talk with a health care provider or a mental health specialist. Your local mental health association or county medical society can provide references. In an emergency, call the National Suicide Hotline at 1-800-SUICIDE.

Hospitalization and treatment for mental illness may be necessary until the risk of committing suicide has passed. Many of those who attempt suicide try it again within the next year.

What are the effects of suicide on others?

Losing a loved one to suicide is a very different type of loss and creates emotions and feelings different from other losses. When someone close to you commits suicide, you may experience the following reactions.

- You may feel angry or blame other family members.
- You may feel numb and out of touch with reality.
- You may feel frustrated because you need to know what happened, and you may never know.
- You may feel guilty. Constantly thinking "if only" can lead to extreme stress and anxiety.
- It may be hard to stop thinking about your loved one's suicide. You may even start thinking about committing suicide yourself.
- You may not want to love again because you do not want to be hurt again.

There are many resources available to those who have suffered a loss through suicide. Talking with a mental health specialist about your feelings can help. A support group or organization that helps survivors of suicide can offer a safe place to talk about your loss.

The National Alliance for the Mentally Ill can provide information, education, and access to support groups. NAMI's toll-free help line number is 1-800-950-NAMI, or 1-800-950-6264.

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