

Suicide

Suicide has been described as "a permanent solution to a temporary problem." College-age people seem to be particularly vulnerable, since they live in a high-stress atmosphere where relationships may be unstable and losses and disappointments can seem insurmountable.

If you have ever been in such pain or despair that you thought about ending your life, you already know two valuable things: one, that at the time your outlook seems truly hopeless; and two, such feelings of despair do not last forever. With the passage of time you are able to find peace, interest, even joy again. This knowledge is invaluable if you find yourself troubled by suicidal thoughts, yours or a friend's. If help can be found during the low point, often tragedy can be prevented.

If you find yourself at risk for suicide the basic rule is to **SEEK HELP**. One element of despair is the feeling of being alone. In a suicidal state, you have lost perspective; you need an ally for that part of yourself which does not want to die, but rather wants to stop hurting.

If a friend talks about suicide, or drops clues -- for example, giving away belongings, winding up his or her unfinished business, quitting clubs or activities, saying things like "If I don't see you again..." or "I hate my life, I wish I were dead," he or she may be asking indirectly for help. When there has been a significant loss, feelings of sadness and depression are appropriate; it's when someone lingers in the past and loses hope for the future that a depression may become self-destructive. Paradoxically, friends who have been depressed for a long period and suddenly begin to seem much better are in the highest-risk phase for suicide -- their improvement might reflect a decision to put an end to their life.

What if a friend gives us these clues?

Our tendency is to want to make the person feel better, partly because we feel worried, helpless, or inadequate. Unfortunately, this approach may make the person feel as if we are denying or discounting their painful feelings. Although they have many wonderful qualities and much to live for, at this moment they are unable to appreciate that. It's more helpful to acknowledge that they seem to be feeling really low, and to **DIRECTLY ASK** if they are thinking of killing themselves. This may seem risky, since we may fear that our question will precipitate the act. But pretending that if we ignore the seriousness of the pain then the crisis will go away only leaves our friend further isolated in his or her own hopelessness. What's needed most is understanding and help in finding a professionally trained person who can work with your friend toward rebuilding a sense of hope.

At the University of Oregon, professional help is available through the **University Counseling Center (346-3227)**, the **Student Health Center (346 - 4441)**, or the **Dean of Students office (346 - 1160)**. The University Counseling Center offers emergency service on a walk-in basis between 8a.m. and 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. If you are

worried about a friend or about your own feelings, you are welcome either to come in or call the **Crisis Line at 346 - 4488** between 5 p.m. and 8 a.m. on weekdays and all day on weekends and holidays. The number for emergency calls of all kinds is 346 -6666 if immediate intervention is needed; to reach the Office of Public Safety call 346 -5444. At any of these numbers, someone is available to help you decide what to do next.

Remember, suicide is a preventable death; the crisis stage lasts for only a brief period, and the help you need to make a tremendous difference in a friend's life -- or your own! -- is readily available.

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