

# Helping the Suicidal Person

This is a short overview of:

- **Warning Signs**
- **Risks**
- **Ways to help**

You can get immediate help by contacting a mental health professional or calling the National Suicide Hotline at **1-800-273-8255**.

For Dane County residents, you may also call:  
**608-280-2600 (24 Hour Crisis Line)**

## Warning Signs:

- Someone threatens to hurt or kill him/herself.
- Someone talks of wanting to hurt or kill him/herself.
- Someone looks for ways to kill him/herself by seeking access to:
  - Firearms
  - Pills
  - Other identified means
- Someone begins to talk or write about:
  - Death
  - Dying
  - Suicide

## Additional Warning Signs:

- Hopelessness
- Rage, uncontrolled anger, seeking revenge
- Acting reckless or taking part in risky activities
- Feeling like there is no way out
- Increased alcohol or drug use
- Withdrawing from friends, family and society
- Anxiety, agitation, unable to sleep or sleeping all the time
- Dramatic mood changes
- No reason for living; no sense of purpose in life

## **Important Information about someone at risk of suicide:**

- The risk of suicide may increase following discharge. The risk is greatest in the month after discharge.
- Take all medicine as prescribed and make no changes without talking with your provider. Keep all psychotherapy appointments and follow treatment advice.
- Symptoms may impair judgment. Many patients may believe the world (and especially their family) is better off without them; they may think the only solution is suicide.
- Avoid intoxicants of any kind (alcohol, drugs).
- Remove any possible means of suicide. This could be hidden medicines, weapons, etc.
- Firearms are the most common method of suicide.

## **How to be helpful:**

- Be aware. Learn the warning signs.
- Get involved. Be available to show interest and support.
- Ask about suicide and suicidal thoughts.
- Listen. Allow for expression of feelings. Accept the feelings.
- Be non-judgmental.
- Don't give advice.
- Don't ask "why"; this promotes defensiveness.
- Offer understanding, not sympathy.
- Don't act shocked, this can create distance.
- Offer hope that other ways to solve a problem are available.
- Take action. Remove means. Get help from professionals.

Remember the National Suicide Hotline number:  
**1-800-273-TALK (8255)**

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