

HOW TO SUPPORT SOMEONE YOU KNOW WHO IS SUICIDAL

1. Recognize the warning signs of depression and suicide risk. Research suggests that the majority of people who attempt suicide do something to let others know their intentions before they act. These "warning signs" consist of personal behaviors, verbal and non-verbal communications. Mental and emotional illnesses such as depression and bi-polar disorders are often tied to suicidal feelings. The risk of suicide may be greatest as the person's depression begins to lift.

2. Take suicidal statements seriously and trust your instincts. Fifty to 75 percent of all suicides give some warning of their intentions to a friend or family member. Imminent signs must be taken seriously.

3. Get involved and use "active listening." By listening to what the person in crisis has to say and by asking direct and open questions, we show our willingness to talk about anything with that person, including his/her feelings about suicide.

- Start by telling the person you are concerned and give him or her examples.
- Do not attempt to argue someone out of suicide. Rather, let the person know you care, that he or she is not alone, that suicidal feelings are temporary and that depression can be treated. Avoid the temptation to say, "You have so much to live for," or "Your suicide will hurt your friends and family."

4. Encourage the person to seek professional help.

- Be actively involved in encouraging the person to see a physician or mental health professional immediately.
- Individuals contemplating suicide often don't believe they can be helped, so you may have to do more.
- Help the person connect with Counseling Services at 413-662-5331 or the Brien Center at 413-499-0412.

5. While directly asking about suicide can be scary, the person you're concerned about needs you to ask, "Do you feel so badly you are thinking about suicide?" Almost everyone thinks about suicide at some point in their life. By listening and observing the "warning signs" of suicide and asking direct questions, we demonstrate our willingness to talk about anything with the person in crisis, including his/her feelings about suicide. He or she is likely to feel understood and that you understand the pain they are in. It can be a great relief to the person if his or her suicidal feelings can be brought out into the open and discussed freely without shock or disapproval; it shows that you are taking the person seriously.

6. If the answer is "Yes," take the person's response seriously and continue the "Suicide Risk" assessment questions.

- "Do you have a plan to take your own life?" or "Have you thought of how you would do it?"
- "Do you have the means or materials available to act out your plan?" If so, "What and where are they?"
- "Have you set a time?" or "Have you decided when you would do it?"

If the answer is still "Yes," ask:

- "Have you ever attempted suicide before?"
- "What happened then?"

If the person has a definite plan, the means are available and the time is set and immediate, you should consider the person to be high risk for suicide.

7. Do not leave a person whom you feel is "high risk" for suicide alone, even for a moment. If a person has expressed suicidal feelings, has a plan, the means available and has a time set, you should always take him or her seriously. If there is any doubt, take him or her seriously. A person who is "high risk" for suicide **should not be left alone.** Keep talking to that person, stay with him or her or arrange for another party (someone who that person trusts and feels comfortable with) to stay with them. Remove any firearms, drugs or sharp objects that could be used for suicide.

8. If the person in crisis has taken some form of life-threatening action, get help immediately. If a person has taken any action that you believe could be considered life-threatening, don't hesitate to call Public Safety at 413-662-5100 or call 911.