

Befriending A Person In Crisis

The basic guidelines to follow when befriending a person who is in crisis and potentially suicidal are the same no matter what your role, lay or professional, or relationship. Samaritans suggests that you begin by following these six steps.

Take all talk of suicide seriously

People who are considering suicide frequently will tell someone, especially if they feel that person is trustworthy and respectful and will take them seriously. Being accessible is the key.

Get involved and use "Active Listening"

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

Recognize the warning signs of depression

Since the majority of people who attempt suicide literally do or say something to let others know their intentions before they act, it is important to know the "warning signs." They begin with noticeable or abrupt changes in that person's "normal" behavior (whatever *normal* is for them) and include:

- Changes in sleeping patterns and eating habits
- Loss of interest in school, work, hobbies, etc.
- Alcohol and drug abuse, impulsive dangerous acts
- Feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, etc.
- Feelings of guilt, low self-esteem, shame
- Talking about and giving away prized possessions

Many depressions contain some element of grief and/or recent loss(es) tied to death, divorce, a job, a broken relationship, perceived status, etc. Watch for statements like "nobody cares," "everyone will be better off without me" and "I wish I was dead." Talking about suicide is a significant warning sign.

Don't be afraid to ask: "Has it gotten to the point that you feel suicidal?"

If the answer is "Yes," take the person seriously and continue the "suicide risk" assessment questions:

- "Do you have a plan to take your own life?"
- "Do you have the means to act out your plan?"
- "Have you decided when you would do it?"

If the person has a plan, the means available and has set a specific time, consider the person "high risk." Also find out if the person or any member of their family has ever attempted suicide before.

Do not leave a person who is "High Risk" alone, for even a moment

Most people can get through their moment(s) of crisis, if they have someone who will spend time with them, listen, take them seriously and acknowledge their thoughts and feelings. Continue to befriend, maintain ongoing communication, utilize pre-screened resources and expand your own support network.

If the person has taken some form of life-threatening action, get help

If a person has taken any action that you believe could be considered life threatening, do not hesitate to get that person to a hospital yourself (if practical) or call an ambulance or emergency service.