



SELF-HELP NOTES

UI COUNSELING & TESTING CENTER
CONTINUING EDUCATION BLDG, 306, 885-6716



HOW TO HELP A FRIEND WHO IS SUICIDAL

After accidents and homicides, suicide is the third leading cause of death among young adults ages 15-24. Men are more likely to commit suicide than women and usually use violent means to end their own lives. Women, on the other hand, are more likely to attempt suicide and usually use drugs or poison to try and end their lives.

Why do college students kill themselves?

Because each individual is unique there is no single reason why a student commits suicide. There are several factors, however, that may contribute to a student having suicidal thoughts. These include:

- Major life transitions. The loss of a loved one, breaking up with a boyfriend/girlfriend, moving to a new town or school, failing an exam or course, not getting into one's choice of major, etc., are major life changes that can cause a college student to feel unloved, depressed, isolated and lonely.
- Feelings of hopelessness and helplessness. Problems in living sometimes seem more than one can bear. No matter what is done, things do not seem to be getting better and no one seems to care or can help.
- Negative feelings about oneself. A student who is suicidal may experience feelings of worthlessness and of being a failure. He/she may not be doing well in school or may not be excelling in academic or social areas that are of interest.
- Wanting to end unbearable pain. Frequently, suicide is an attempt to end pain which seems unbearable or to deal with problems that seem overwhelming.
- Alcohol and substance abuse. Alcohol is a depressant and can exacerbate depressed feelings. Alcohol and substance abuse can cause a student to lose self-control and engage in impulsive suicidal behaviors.

Depression is also a major contributing factor to suicidal thinking. Depression may result from several factors, including the recent loss of a family member or friend, disappointments in romantic relationships, failure to live up to one's own or others expectations, or a genetic predisposition.

What to do if someone is suicidal

▪ **Take it seriously**

Myth: "People who talk about it don't do it." Studies have found that more than 75% of all completed suicides did things in the few weeks or months prior to their deaths to indicate to others that they were in deep despair. Anyone expressing suicidal feelings needs immediate attention.

Myth: "Anyone who tries to kill him/herself has got to be crazy." Perhaps 10% of all suicidal people are psychotic or have delusional beliefs about reality. Most suicidal people suffer from depression, but are not "crazy". In addition, many depressed people are not suicidal.

"Those problems weren't enough to commit suicide over," is often said by people who knew someone who completed suicide. You cannot assume that because you feel something is not worth being suicidal about, that the person you are with feels the same way. It is not how bad the problem is, but how badly it's hurting the person who has it.

- **Remember that suicidal behavior is a cry for help.**
Myth: "If a someone is going to kill him/herself, nothing can stop him." The fact that a person is still alive is sufficient proof that part of him or her wants to remain alive. The suicidal person is ambivalent – part wants to live and part wants, not so much death, as the pain to end. It is the part that wants to live that tells another "I feel like killing myself." If a suicidal person turns to you, some part of him or her wants your help.
- **Listen.**
Give the person every opportunity to unburden troubles and ventilate feelings. You don't need to say much and there are no magic words. If you are concerned, your voice and manner will show it. Give him or her relief from being alone with the pain; let the person know you are glad he or she turned to you. Provide patience, sympathy, and acceptance. Avoid arguments and advice giving.
- **Express your concern.**
Confronting someone you care about does not require judging, blaming, or attacking the person, nor does it require demeaning or forcing the person to take action. Confronting someone means that you have the courage to let your friend know what you have seen and heard, that you are concerned about him or her, and that you are willing to help.
- **ASK: "Are you having thoughts of suicide?"**
Myth: "Talking about it may give someone the idea." Everyone knows about suicide, so you will not put the idea in their mind. If you ask a despairing person this question, you are doing a good thing: you are showing that you care, that you take him or her seriously, and that you are willing to let him or her share the pain with you. If the person is having thoughts of suicide, find out how far along the thoughts have progressed.
- **If the person is acutely suicidal, do not leave him or her alone.**
If the means are present, try to get rid of them. Contact the nearest emergency room or call 911.
- **Urge professional help.**
Help the person get in contact with a professional. Persistence and patience may be needed to seek out, engage and explore many options. In any referral situation, let the person know you care and want to maintain contact.
- **No secrets.**
The part of the person that is afraid of more pain says "Don't tell anyone." The part that wants to stay alive is communicating with you. Respond to that part of the person and persistently seek out a mature and compassionate person with whom you can review the situation. Do not try to go it alone. Get professional help for the person and for yourself.
- **From crisis to recovery.**
Most people have suicidal thoughts or feelings at some point in their lives; yet less than 2% of all deaths are suicides. Nearly all suicidal people suffer from conditions that can improve with time and with the assistance of counseling. Your goal is to be supportive and to make it easier for the person to seek help.

Contact the Counseling & Testing Center.

If you are concerned about someone who is suicidal, the University of Idaho Counseling & Testing Center is here to consult with you and to discuss how to deal with a suicidal person. In addition, we offer free counseling and psychotherapy for these and related issues for full time UI students. For more information or to schedule an appointment, call the **Counseling & Testing Center (Mary E. Forney Hall, Rm. 306, 1210 Blake Ave.)**, at **208-885-6716** or **visit our website at www.uidaho.edu/ctc**

All appointments are strictly confidential.