



SUICIDE PREVENTION TOOL KIT FOR FAMILY MEMBERS AND PEERS



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PURPOSE:

This is a suicide prevention educational resource for family members and others who may have relatives, friends, or peers with mental illness who may be suicidal. It presents information about possible suicide risk and safely helping the person. Please note this is not a substitute for professional crisis intervention or emergency services.

No one is immune from suicide risk; this information applies to you and those around you as well.

1. BASIC CONCEPTS:

- A suicide attempt may occur when an individual has both the intent to die and the capability and means for potentially lethal self-harm.
- A desire to die may result from an individual's *belief* that he is a burden to those he cares about and/or is disconnected from those important to him.
- A capability for lethal self-harm may result from past attempts, abuse, trauma, exposure to violence, pain, disability, or mentally rehearsing a suicide plan.

2. CHAIN OF LIFE:

- Look for (i) early signs of suicide risk, (ii) warning signs of suicide, and (iii) danger signs
- Screen for suicide intent or desire to die
- If high risk persuade the person to accept immediate help; if no imminent risk refer to help
- If high risk, and offer of voluntary help is declined, call 9-1-1 and/or seek involuntary psychiatric care
- If low risk (no imminent danger), refer to community behavioral health provider

3. EARLY SIGNS OF SUICIDE RISK:

- Talking about being trapped, losing control
 - Initiating or increasing alcohol/Rx drug use
 - Withdrawing from family/friends/treatment
 - Anxiety/agitation/sleep problems/nightmares
 - Mood changes, anger, panic, growing pessimism
 - Persistent/growing self-criticism; rigid thinking
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***Be alert after depressive and psychotic episodes,
relapses, and criminal justice contact***

4. WARNING SIGNS OF SUICIDE:

- Escalating impulsivity/negative behavior
- Marked personality/mood change
- Withdrawing from family/friends/services
- Indifference to activities/interests
- Being present-oriented/vague on future
- Texting/talking/writing/drawing about death
- Giving away/disregard for possessions/pets

5. DANGER SIGNS OF SUICIDE:

These are earliest detectable indicators of very high suicide risk in near-term (minutes, hours, days):

- Threats to hurt or kill self
- Looking for/acquiring lethal means (e.g., weapon)
- Voicing a specific suicide plan (when/where/how)

Any of these signs indicate that someone may need an emergency psychiatric evaluation

6. SUICIDE RISK FACTORS:

- U** Unconnected; weak social supports; loss
 - N** Negative/pessimistic view of self/future
 - S** Shame due to humiliation/victimization
 - A** Attempt/abuse history/alcohol use
 - F** Financial problems/loss of benefits
 - E** Emptiness/depressed/sad/hopeless
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***The 30 days after a psychiatric hospital discharge
is a very high suicide risk period***

7. SIGNS OF SUICIDE INTENT:

Does your family member or peer:

- Say that he is not part of anything?
- Say that people would be better off without him?
- Say that he has thought of suicide?
- Say that he had thoughts about suicide in the last two months?
- Say that he is thinking about suicide right now?

8. SIGNS OF CAPABILITY:

Has your family member or peer:

- Ever self-injured without intent to die?
- Experienced abuse, violence, pain, serious injury, or trauma? Is she/he a Veteran?
- Described a specific suicide plan?
- Access to the means to take his life?
- Tried out a suicide plan in any way?

One or more “YES” answers to questions about both INTENT and CAPABILITY may indicate HIGH suicide risk

9. HOW TO HELP:

- Assess situation for safety of all parties
- Listen and say that you care; be direct
- Assure the person knows that he/she is not alone
- Make sure the person knows what's going on
- Try to keep the person from possible means (*only if this can be done safely; otherwise await police*)
- Do not leave him alone or let him leave alone
- Call 9-1-1 or local crisis center

REFERENCES:

Joiner, T. (2005) *Why People Die by Suicide* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Roy, A. (2001) “Consumers of Mental Health Services” *Suicide and Life Threatening Behavior* 31 (Supplement) 60-83

Rudd, M. et al. (2006) “Warning signs for suicide: Theory, research, and clinical applications” *Suicide and Life Threatening Behavior* 36(3) 255-262

MORE INFORMATION:

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention – www.afsp.org

American Association of Suicidology – www.suicidology.org

Suicide Prevention Resource Center – www.sprc.org