

How to recognize suicide signs and what to do to help

At one time or another, every young person finds life overwhelming while in college. Some can't cope or can't find a solution to their emotions or troubles and fall into despair seeing suicide as the only way out. Before a person reaches this stage, however, there are often red flags. It's vital that these signs aren't ignored, overlooked or minimized by family, college faculty, friends and loved ones.



A common struggle that can affect anyone

If you suspect a student you know is considering suicide, act quickly to get them professional support. There are many reasons that can cause someone to see suicide as the only solution to their problems and it may, at one time or another, happen to you, your family, friends, classmates or colleagues.



What are the warning signs

Being aware of what signs to look for is a huge step in preventing suicide. The young person may exhibit multiple signs or just one. Any indication should prompt you to get help immediately.



Common danger signs include:

- repeated expressions of hopelessness, helplessness, worthlessness or desperation
- behavior that is out of character—e.g., someone who is normally careful acts recklessly
- symptoms of depression—sleeplessness, social withdrawal, loss of appetite, loss of interest in activity and/or student life
- a sudden and unexpected change in someone suffering from anxiety or depression to an unusually cheerful attitude
- giving away prized possessions to friends and other students; making a will, taking out insurance or other preparations for death
- making remarks related to death and dying or telling someone they intend to commit suicide, even in a joking manner
- tension, anxiety, nervousness, impulsiveness



How to help a student with suicidal thoughts

If you're concerned about the possibility, but are unsure about the young person's state of mind, break down the walls of silence and:

Offer support. Find a safe, private place to voice your concerns, speak to them and better assess the situation.

Be direct. Talk openly about feelings and concerns and never make a promise to keep it a secret. It's important to find out information to pass on to a professional.

Listen. Be a non-judgmental voice. Don't tell them not to think about suicide or minimize problems.

Take protective steps. They shouldn't be alone for the next few days or weeks. Help make contact with health professionals, family, friends, college faculty and other mental health services on campus on their behalf.

Draft a promise. Have them promise or even sign a contract stating that he or she won't hurt themselves before seeing a mental health professional. Call often and check on their progress.

Remove all dangers. Any prescription and non-prescription drugs or medication or firearms should be removed from their room and there shouldn't be access to any dangerous items.



A cry for help

Many young people who consider or plan for suicide may not really want to die. They may simply see it as the only solution to end their pain and suffering. When someone you know exhibits warning signs, it's a cry for help. Take action by seeking support immediately.

Remember: if someone you know is considering suicide or has already created a suicide plan and you sense it's an emergency situation, act immediately and call emergency support lines.

