

## **THE WARNING SIGNS OF SUICIDE**

Suicide is rarely a spur of the moment decision. In the weeks, days and hours before people kill themselves, there are sometimes clues and warning signs.

The strongest and most disturbing signs may be verbal, for example people may start saying things like: "I can't go on," "Nothing matters any more," "Nobody would miss me if I wasn't here," or even more directly, "I'm thinking of ending it all". Such remarks should always be taken seriously.

Other common warning signs include the person:

- Becoming depressed or withdrawn
- Behaving recklessly
- Getting affairs in order and giving away valued possessions
- Showing a marked change in behaviour, attitudes or appearance
- Abusing drugs or alcohol
- Experiencing a major loss or life change

Certain situations can challenge people's coping resources. In most cases these situations themselves naturally provoke distressed feelings that do not lead to suicide.

However, if people are already psychologically fragile, and/or not socially supported to deal with these situations, they can be at increased risk of developing suicidal feelings. Examples of such situations include:

### **Situations**

- Family history of suicide or violence
- Sexual, physical or emotional abuse
- Rape
- Death of a partner, close friend or family member
- Divorce or separation, end of a relationship
- Physical injury/trauma/long term illness
- Failing academic performance, impending exams or exam results
- Job loss, long term unemployment, problems at work
- Impending legal action
- Recent imprisonment or upcoming release
- Experience of bullying, past or present
- Homesickness, isolation after leaving home
- Homesickness, isolation, culture shock for international students
- Struggles with sexual orientation, "coming out"

Positive support from family, friends, partners, faith community members and professional helpers can help people to deal with such challenges so that they do not feel overwhelmed by what has happened or what is going on. This support also breaks the isolation that many people feel in such circumstances.

### **Signs to Look For**

Here are more detailed examples of signs that can indicate that somebody is depressed and possibly contemplating suicide. Generally the more signs a person displays, the higher the risk.

### **Behaviours**

- Crying
- Fighting
- Lack of interest in appearance/self neglect
- Loss of interest, motivation or attendance at work/place of study

- Withdrawal from social interaction or changes in behaviour with friends or strangers
- Breaking the law
- Impulsiveness or recklessness, for example when driving
- Self mutilation – particularly first time occasion or severe
- Self harm that is more severe than usual for habitual self harmers
- Writing about death and suicide, watching TV or using the internet to look at the subject
- Previous suicidal behaviour, thoughts or attempts
- Extremes of behaviour
- Changes in behaviour
- Cease taking medication
- Lack of energy
- Disturbed sleep patterns – sleeping too much or too little
- Loss of appetite/eating disorders
- Sudden weight gain or loss
- Increase in minor illnesses
- Change of sex drive

### **Thoughts and Emotions**

- Thoughts of suicide (although it's important to recognise that many people have thoughts without intent)
- Loneliness – lack of support from family and friends
- Rejection, feeling marginalised
- Feeling 'different' owing to life experiences, age, sexuality, nationality, culture or other
- Deep sadness or guilt
- Unable to see beyond a narrow focus
- Increased levels of daydreaming, feeling 'spacey' or dissociated
- Anxiety and stress
- Feelings of helplessness, pointlessness or powerlessness to change
- Feeling no sense of future 'it will always be like this'
- Loss of self worth or low self esteem

### **How to Help**

- Always take the person and their feelings seriously
- Listen to them talking about how they feel
- Try to avoid intrusive questions if they don't want to talk
- Try not to leave them on their own
- Share your worries with others and seek support for yourself
- Encourage the person to seek support, either from a trusted friend, relative or to seek professional help from a GP, counsellor or the Samaritans
- Tell someone in authority at university directly, a tutor, GP, counsellor or someone from Student Support Services

Remember if the worst thing happens and someone does choose to take their own life, it was their decision and no-one else is responsible for this choice.

### **Contacts:**

**Samaritans** tel: 116 123 - web [www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org) - email [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)  
[www.studentsagainstdepression.org](http://www.studentsagainstdepression.org)