

SELF HELP SHEET

Student Counselling Service

Is Someone You Know In Crisis or Considering Suicide?

Why Do People Kill Themselves?

A suicidal crisis is usually the result of many factors. Although everyone experiences disappointments, failures and periods of unhappiness, we each handle situations differently due to our personal history and emotional resources. What may seem insignificant to one person may be particularly distressing to another. Therefore, when discussing a suicidal crisis, it is necessary that the situation be considered from that person's perspective.

Risk Signs

Although some suicides are impulse events, the vast majority of people who take their own lives do give clues to their upcoming actions. Therefore, the following are some signs that are associated with suicide. The more signs that are present the greater the risk of possible suicidal behaviour.

- Talking about suicide, self-harm or risky behavior
- Expressing feelings of hopelessness, despair or extreme loneliness
- Suffering from a recent loss, such as a romantic break-up or bereavement
- Abusing alcohol or drugs
- Experiencing depression
- Withdrawing from family and friends
- Declining academic performance or erratic attendance at lectures
- Changing behavior, mood or personality
- Giving away possessions or making final plans

How You Can Help?

- Remain calm. Sit and really listen to what the person is saying. Show empathy and understanding. Take the person's concerns seriously.
- Ask about suicide. Don't be afraid to ask if the person is having thoughts of suicide. You cannot put the idea into his or her mind.
- Express concerns. Tell the person you are concerned about his or her well-being. Reassure the person that the emotional pain can be survived and other options are out there.
- Seek professional help. Although you want to help, you are probably not qualified to take full responsibility for the person. You can be of the most assistance by arranging an urgent appointment for the student with a professional.
- Promise support, not secrets. If a person confides to you that he or she is thinking of suicide, but will not seek help, do not feel obligated to keep this information secret. Offer support to help the person through the crisis. If you are unsure of what to do, consult with a trusted adult (Tutor, GP, counselor, etc.) about the way forward. It is preferable to have the person alive and angry with you, rather than gone forever.

Myths About Suicide

Myth: You have to be crazy to even think about suicide. Fact: Most people have thought about suicide at some point in their life. Most suicides and suicide attempts are made by normal, intelligent people who are distressed and expecting too much of themselves in the midst of a crisis.

Myth: If a person is seriously considering suicide, there is nothing you can do. Fact: People considering suicide want to escape their problems, and most suicide crises are temporary. Concerned friends can assist by finding professional help and offering support to the person through the crisis.

Myth: Talking about suicide may give a person the idea. Fact: The crisis and resulting emotional distress may have already triggered the thought in a vulnerable person. Your openness and concern in asking about suicide will encourage a distressed person to talk about his or her problems, which may reduce anxiety. It may also allow the person to feel less lonely and possibly relieved.

Places to Get Help Outside of College/After-Hours

Samaritans (24 hours) 1850 609090

Emergency services (fire brigade, Gardaí, ambulance) 999

Local G.P., psychiatrist, counsellor, community or support group

Recommended Reading

The Suicidal Mind by Edwin Shneidman (1996)

Night Falls Fast: Understanding Suicide by Kay Redfield Jamison (1999)

Suicide and Attempted Suicide by Mark Williams (2001)

Suggested Websites

Irish Association of Suicidology www.ias.ie

Samaritans www.samaritans.org.uk

Mental Health Ireland www.mentalhealthireland.ie

Virtual Pamphlet Collection <http://counseling.uchicago.edu/vpc/>
