## Caring for a person who is suicidal

80% of those that commit suicide have communicated their intention to do so to someone else prior to the act.

If you get the call or someone comes by that is suicidal, you need to be the person to handle that situation. To pass them off to someone else communicates to that person that you do not care, and that is a recipe for disaster.

Take seriously every hint or threat of suicide that a person makes even if you are certain they are just trying to get attention. There are people trying to get attention that fumble a suicide attempt and end up dying.

**Quick Steps:**

If a participant contacts you and talks about wanting to end their life, you can assess the situation by asking the following three questions.

**Question 1: Are you having thoughts about suicide?**

**Question 2: Do you have a plan? (drug overdose, shooting self with a gun, hanging, etc)**

**Question 3: Do you have access to the …. (pills, gun, rope, etc)**

**Promise**: Can you promise me that you will call (counselor, parent, pastor, etc) before you do anything to hurt yourself?

Then **get help**.

If the person has already taken pills or is in immediate danger, get their location and have someone call 911.

Full Walkthrough:

1. Affirm them verbally. Tell them they did the right thing by coming to you for help.

“you did the right thing by calling”

# “I am glad you came by”

“I think there is help for you”

Affirm their right decisions. It is important for them to know they can make good decisions.

1. Speak calmly, confidently, but with authority.

Take charge without being bossy. They are looking to be rescued and they need to be. Be sure not to challenge them by disagreeing with what they say.

1. Show care, concern but most of all acceptance of them.
2. Find common ground between the two of you

They need help

You want to give it.

1. Use the word help often.
2. Develop an atmosphere of trust.

Give straight forward answers. Be honest

1. After you tell them who you are, try to get their name, number and address, but do not pressure them to get this information.
2. Do not promise you will not tell anyone about their situation.

There are laws forbidding you from doing this.

1. Listen to them with few interruptions.
2. Keep the conversation going until trust is built and the person seems stable enough to handle being given a resource.

You could say things like: “a person in your situation usually hurts – what hurts?” or “What got you here?” or “What have you tried to do to cope?” It is okay to ask questions, but no WHY questions

1. Find out if they have a plan.

“How would you harm yourself?”

Do not be afraid to talk about it openly. Do not be judgmental though, they already feel enough guilt. Telling them they are being selfish is not the right thing to say.

Don’t be afraid to talk about the aftermath of suicide.

1. Evaluate their plan.

How lethal is it? How available is it? How specific is it? The more lethal, available and specific, the more serious the situation.

If serious, family members and possibly a hospital needs to be notified.

1. Give instructions to stop the plan.

“Turn off the gas”

“Have your roommate dispose or hide the gun”

Make them promise to call you if they start thinking again that they might do something.

1. Provide resources for them

A support system

Counselor

Place to stay

1. Have them make a commitment preferably in writing.

Promising someone something is a deterrent to a person

committing suicide

Reference

Wright, H. Norman: Crisis & Trauma Counseling: A Practical Guide for Ministers, Counselors, and Lay Counselors. Ventura, CA: Regal, 2003.