

May is Mental Health Awareness Month

Mental Health Awareness and Suicide Prevention

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May is “National Mental Health Awareness Month,” and under this broad title comes: Borderline Personality Disorder Awareness Month, Mental Health Counseling Week (May 6-12), National Prevention Week (May 11-17), World Maternal Mental Health Day (May 6), and National Children’s Mental Health Awareness Day (May 9).

If someone you know is struggling emotionally or having a hard time, you can be the difference in getting them the help they need. It’s important to take care of yourself when you are supporting someone through a difficult time, as this may stir up difficult emotions. If it does, please reach out for support yourself. Talking to someone about their mental health may seem very personal and invasive but letting someone know that you care and that there is help available might be just the words they need to hear. When someone is in the depths of despair, they may not be able to see an answer.

Risk factors are characteristics that make it more likely that someone will consider, attempt, or die by suicide. They can't *cause* or *predict* a suicide attempt, but they're important to be aware of. Certainly, there are no guarantees in preventing a suicide, but knowing you did everything that you could have, may be helpful in bringing you the peace you may need to survive the loss of a loved one. There are many influencing risk factors:

- Mental disorders, particularly mood disorders, schizophrenia, anxiety disorders, and certain personality disorders
- Alcohol and other substance use disorders
- Hopelessness
- Impulsive and/or aggressive tendencies
- History of trauma or abuse
- Lack of healthcare, especially mental health and substance abuse treatments
- Family history of suicide
- Job or financial loss
- Lack of social support and sense of isolation
- Loss of relationships
- Easy access to lethal means
- Local clusters of suicide
- Stigma associated with asking for help
- physical illnesses
- previous suicide attempt(s)
- Cultural and religious beliefs
- Media and internet exposure to suicides

Warning signs may help you determine if a loved one is at risk for suicide, especially if the behavior is new, has increased, or seems related to a painful event, loss, or change:

- Talking about wanting to die or to kill themselves
- Looking for a way to kill themselves, like searching online or buying a gun
- Talking about feeling hopeless or having no reason to live
- Talking about feeling trapped or in unbearable pain
- Talking about being a burden to others
- Increasing the use of alcohol or drugs
- Acting anxious or agitated, behaving recklessly
- Sleeping too little or too much
- Withdrawing or isolating themselves
- Showing rage or talking about seeking revenge
- Extreme mood swings

If you or someone you know exhibits any of these signs, know that you are not alone. If a child or adolescent is talking about a friend in distress, talk with a trusted adult (parent, teacher or counselor). If you yourself feel overwhelmed with the responsibility of helping someone, call a friend, relative or the police to help you take the suicidal person to the emergency room. You can also seek help by calling the Suicide Prevention Lifeline, 1-800-273-8255. For our military loved ones, there is also a Veterans Crisis Line: 800-273-8255.



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