

SUICIDE PREVENTION

Suicide is the third leading cause of death among young adults aged 15-24 and the numbers are increasing.

It should be noted that men are more likely to commit suicide than women. This is because men usually use violent means to end their lives and females, on the other hand, are more likely to attempt suicide with the use of drugs and poison.

A suicide attempt is a “cry for help” and a request for social support. The suicidal person is letting his or her feelings be known and his or her problems seem overwhelming and too difficult to handle.

Why do university students kill themselves?

There are several factors that may contribute to a student having suicidal thoughts. These include:

- ◆ **Experiencing a major life transition** (e.g. the loss of a loved one, breaking up with a boyfriend or girlfriend, moving to a new town or university).
- ◆ **Feelings of hopelessness and helplessness.**
- ◆ **Developing negative feelings about oneself** (experiencing feelings of worthlessness and of being a failure).
- ◆ **Wanting to end unbearable pain or problems that are too overwhelming** (using alcohol and substance).

Depression is major contributing factor to suicidal thinking and it may result from several factors, including the recent loss of a family member or friend, disappointments in romantic relationships, or failure to live up to one's expectations.

Myths and Facts about suicide

1. People who talk about suicide rarely actually commit suicide.

FACT: This is false, people who commit suicide often give a clue or warning of their intentions. The majority of people who attempt suicide say or do something to express their intention before they act. Do not overlook even subtle threats or statements.

Change the World

NELSON MANDELA
UNIVERSITY

Enquiries

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counselling@mandela.ac.za



mandela.ac.za

Suicide Prevention

2. The suicidal person wants to die and there is nothing anyone can do — they will eventually do it.

FACT: This is false. A Suicidal persons usually feel ambivalent about dying. People usually don't want to die and they want instead to end their horrible emotional suffering.

3. A suicide attempt means that the attempter will always have thoughts of suicide.

FACT: This is false. Often a suicide attempt is made during a particularly stressful period. If the remainder of that period can be well managed, then the attempter can go on with a healthy and productive life.

4. If you ask a person directly, "Do you feel like killing yourself?" this will lead to a suicide attempt.

FACT: This is false. Asking a person directly about suicidal intent will often relieve the anxiety surrounding the feeling and act as a deterrent to the suicidal behavior. You don't create self-destructive feelings in another person simply by talking about suicide.

5. Improvement following a suicidal crisis means that the suicidal risk is over.

FACT: This is false. When a suicidal person begins to feel better, he or she will still be confronted with problems and responsibilities. This can be very difficult and can lead to a return of suicidal thoughts.

There are three types of warning signs in suicide

Psychological

- History of a diagnosed psychiatric disorder
- Depression and depressive symptoms
- Hopelessness
- Anhedonia (extreme loss of interest)
- Obsessive thinking (including death fantasies)
- Mood swings (emotionally labile)
- Extreme guilt or shame
- Extreme anxiety (panic attacks)
- Somatic symptoms (headaches, stomach aches, back pain, rashes, etc.)

Behavioural

- Prior suicide attempts
- Verbal indications: overt or subtle
- Difficulty in making decisions
- Acute loss of energy
- Change of habits, reduction of pleasurable activities

- Giving away prized possessions
- Insomnia/Excessive sleep
- Sexual dysfunctions
- Withdrawal, alienation from support system

Situational

- Loss of significant other
- Loss of health or functions or abilities
- Loss of status and or role
- Threatened major change: family/marital status, job, home, security, legalities
- Sexual or physical abuse
- Self-image changes
- Trauma or accident
- Isolation
- Absent support system
- Family history of abuse/suicide/violence/discord

How to help a suicidal person

- ◆ Be direct and talk openly and matter-of-factly about suicide.
- ◆ Be willing to listen and allow the person to express his/her feelings.
- ◆ Be non-judgmental and don't debate whether suicide is right or wrong, or their feelings are good or bad.
- ◆ Don't lecture the person on the value of life. For the suicidal person their perception of life may be that it is "worthless".
- ◆ Get involved, become available and show interest and support.
- ◆ Don't be sworn to secrecy as you may need to involve others and you may have to involuntarily commit the person to a hospital.
- ◆ Offer hope in the form of other alternatives to suicide.
- ◆ Take action and get family or friends to remove suicidal means, such as guns or pills.
- ◆ Get help from persons or agencies specializing in crisis intervention and suicide prevention.

Questions you can ask a suicidal person

- * Have you ever thought that life wasn't worth the effort?
- * Have you ever had thoughts of hurting yourself or anyone else in the past?
- * Have you ever thought of ending your life?
- * Have you ever attempted to end your life?

- * Are you currently thinking about this?
- * Are you planning to do it?
- * What method would you use if you attempted to kill yourself?
- * Could you resist suicide?
- * What stops you from killing yourself?
- * Have you ever thought of killing someone else?
- * Would you call me if you were suicidal?
- * Would you promise to go immediately to the emergency room at the hospital, if you felt suicidal?

Emergency contact details

SCCDC (Office hours 08:00 to 16:30)

South Campus: **041 504 2511**
North Campus: **041 504 3222**
Missionvale Campus: **041 504 1106**
Second Avenue Campus: **041 504 3854**

Campus Health

South Campus: **041 504 2174**
North Campus: **041 504 3364**
Missionvale Campus: **041 504 1374**
Second Avenue Campus: **041 504 3762**

For after hours emergencies contact

Mandela University Protection Service: **041 504 2009 or 041 504 3483**
Provincial Hospital Casualty Department: **041 392 3911**
Greenacres Hospital Casualty Department: **041 390 7000**
Livingstone Hospital: **041 405 9111**
Suicide Emergency Line: **0800 567 567 or SMS 31393 for a call back**
Life Line (24/7 counselling): **0861 322 322**
Ambulance: **10177** or Police: **10111**

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