

Available Suicide Interventions 11-54.02-K

KNOW the various interventions available to assist at risk personnel, as presented in the EPME Study Guide.

Suicide Interventions

Suicide is a needless and preventable cause of death.

As an informed person, you are the key factor in suicide prevention. Your knowledge of the principles of suicide prevention and your willingness to apply that knowledge might save a life.

By sharing that knowledge with others, you might also break down some of the misconceptions and myths that have kept many suicides from being prevented.

By admitting that a problem exists, getting help, and understanding how to support the work of a professional, you play a life-saving role:

- Accept the possibility that a person may be suicidal.
- Don't assume that a person isn't the "type" or that he or she wouldn't really do it.
- If a person's feelings are deep enough to force him or her to talk about suicide, take the person seriously.

Look for signs of suicide in your personnel. There are several ways to intervene.

Talk to the Person

Talk freely with the at-risk person about his or her feelings. When confronted with a suicide threat or a similar statement, avoid responding with something like, "Think how much better off you are than most people; you should be thankful for how lucky you are..."

This not only ends the conversation, it makes the person who has already been feeling guilty about having suicidal thoughts feel even more guilty. Such comments are not helpful and may even be harmful. Avoid making statements that may compound the problem. Instead, try to keep the conversation going at a deeper level.

***Talk to the Person
(continued)***

Some questions to ask for opening lines of communication are:

- How long have you been feeling this way?
 - Do you know why you feel this way?
 - Have you thought about how you would end your life?
 - Have you made a plan?
 - Have you acquired the means?
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***Open Lines of
Communication***

The at-risk person, by talking about his or her feelings, has opened lines of communication that may not easily be opened again. Take advantage of the situation by talking clearly and calmly about the situation and asking appropriate questions to get the person to talk freely.

Your willingness to talk openly can be a big relief to the at-risk person. He or she probably feared that you would be judgmental or would try to cut off communication and leave. Your acceptance may give the person hope at a time when hope is exactly what he or she needs.

Your questions can yield valuable information that will help a professional evaluate the seriousness of the suicide risk. In general, the more specific the thoughts and plans of suicide revealed by your questions, the graver the risk.

Persons may tell you of plans to take an overdose of medication and of research to determine how much medication they will need. They may tell you that they have been stockpiling their prescriptions until they have enough. Such information leaves little doubt of the seriousness and immediacy of the risk.

***Avoid Making
Judgments***

It is important to avoid making any judgment calls on your own. It could be that if the person has vague notions of suicide but no concrete plans, the risk probably is not imminent. This distinction, however, is only a general principle, NOT a rigid rule.

Many variations and exceptions exist, so don't assume that the risk is not great because the plan is not specific. That evaluation must be left to a professional.

Get Help

Get professional help for the person. No matter what you also do, what your discussion leads to, or how much people deny the intentions to commit suicide, make sure they get professional help.

Get help for at-risk persons even if they try to assure you they won't actually take their own lives. When you see signs of suicide, you can seek the help of a professional through several sources. Even if the person refuses help, call a suicide prevention center or EAP hotline 1-800-222-0364.

In the meantime, if the danger of suicide seems immediate, don't leave the person alone. The information you have gathered by talking with the at-risk person will help the suicide prevention worker counsel you. The counselor can use this information to tell you how to deal with the situation and to suggest a specific course of action.

The help of a professional can be obtained from the following sources:

- Coast Guard Employee Assistance Coordinator
- EAP hotline: 1-800-222-0364
- Crisis Intervention Center
- Mental health clinic
- Physician
- Qualified mental health professional
- Hospital emergency room
- Outpatient clinics
- A clergy person/chaplain

