

Assessing the Risk of Suicide

General warning signs:

- Thinking or talking about things that express feeling hopeless or a desire to die.
- Behaviors suggestive of suicidal intent, such as looking for access to pills, weapons, or other means of killing oneself; increased use of alcohol or drugs; withdrawing or displaying dramatic mood changes.

Warning signs that demand immediate attention:

- Threats to hurt or kill oneself or talking about wanting to hurt or kill oneself.
- Mentioning writing about suicide or death, especially when these actions are out of character for the person.
- Obtaining or looking for ways to kill oneself.
- Giving away prized possessions and other personal belongings, or putting affairs in order.

Recommended response:

- Ask the person if he or she is having thoughts of suicide or is thinking about killing himself or herself. If he or she answers yes, you need to ask these three questions:
 1. Have you decided how you would kill yourself?
 2. Have you decided when you would do it?
 3. Have you taken any steps to secure the things you would need to carry out your plan?
- Ask if he or she has been using alcohol or other drugs. Alcohol or drug use can make a person more susceptible to acting on impulse.
- Ask if he or she has made a suicide attempt in the past. A previous attempt increases the risk that a person will try again or will complete suicide.
- If possible, do not leave the person alone if he or she has a plan and a means to carry out the plan. If he or she has a plan, urge the individual to seek help by calling:
 1. A doctor or therapist;
 2. Emergency room or 911;
 3. Someone from the person's support system, if possible;
 4. The NCLAP (www.nclap.org/) or BarCARES (www.ncbar.org/members/barcares/) for resources; and/or
 5. National Hotline: 1-800-273-TALK (8255) (available 24 hours a day, every day).

Adapted from Mental Health First Aid USA, Revised First Edition, Mental Health Association of Maryland, Missouri Department of Mental Health, and National Council for Behavioral Health (2013).