

# Understanding And Helping A Suicidal Person



- **Many suicides can be prevented.**
- **Understanding the risk factors, warning signs, ways to prevent suicide, and treatment options can help save lives.**
- **Asking someone if they are thinking about suicide does NOT increase their risk for suicide.**
- **The 9-8-8 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline is available for immediate help 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.**
- **Brief interventions, psychotherapy, and medication can provide initial and ongoing support for someone who is suicidal.**

Suicide is a leading cause of death in the United States and a major public health concern. When someone dies by suicide, the effects are felt by family, friends, and communities. Understanding the risk factors, warning signs, ways to help prevent suicide, and effective treatment options can help save lives.

## What Are The Risk Factors Of Suicide?

People of all ages, genders, ethnicities, and socio-economic backgrounds can be at risk for suicide. Common risk factors include:

- Prior suicide attempt(s)
- Family history of suicide or suicide attempts
- Exposure to others' suicidal behavior, such as a family member, peer, or media figure
- Loss - of loved ones, pets, job/income, housing, status, etc.
- Depression, other mental health disorder(s), problem gambling disorder, or substance use disorder
- Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- Financial problems, including debt incurred from online sports betting or other types of gambling
- Chronic pain or illness
- School or work problems
- Criminal or legal problems; being recently released from jail or prison
- Exposure to family violence, including physical or sexual abuse and bullying
- Impulsive or aggressive tendencies
- Limited or no access to physical or behavioral health services
- Sense of hopelessness

Risk factors alone are not a predictor of suicide. Warning signs, coupled with risk factors, are a greater indicator that someone may be thinking of suicide and needs help.

## What Are The Warning Signs Of Suicide?

Warning signs that someone may be at immediate risk for suicide include but are not limited to:

- Talking about wanting to die or to kill themselves
- Saying they feel empty or hopeless or having no reason to live
- Talking about feeling trapped or feeling that there are no solutions
- Showing signs of increased depression, anxiety, or substance use
- Talking about being a burden to others
- Withdrawing from or saying goodbye to family and friends
- Giving away important possessions
- Putting affairs in order, such as making a will
- Taking great risks that could lead to death, such as driving extremely fast



**CONNECTICUT  
Clearinghouse**  
a program of the Connecticut Center  
for Prevention, Wellness and Recovery

**800.232.4424 (phone)**  
**[www.ctclearinghouse.org](http://www.ctclearinghouse.org)**

**A Library and Resource Center on Alcohol, Tobacco, Other Drugs, Mental Health and Wellness**

## How Can Someone Help A Person Who Is Suicidal?

There are five evidence-based action steps that **anyone** can use to help a person who may be thinking about suicide.

- **ASK:** Ask the question, "Are you thinking about suicide?" It's not an easy question, but being direct lets the person know that you are open to talking about suicide. Studies show that asking someone if they are suicidal does not cause them to think about suicide or increase the likelihood that they will attempt suicide. Instead, it can reduce their suicidal thoughts and feelings.
- **BE THERE:** Be willing to listen to the person's response. Allow them to share their thoughts and feelings without judgment. Do not act shocked. Do not promise to keep their thoughts of suicide a secret. Offer hope that alternatives to suicide are available and help them find resources.
- **HELP KEEP THEM SAFE:** Establish immediate safety by finding out: *Has the person already done something to try to kill themselves before talking to you? Do they know how they will kill themselves? Do they have a specific, detailed plan? What sort of access to they have to their planned method (e.g., guns, stockpiled pills, etc.)?* Remove guns, other weapons, or pills only if it is safe to do so. Do not leave them alone.
- **HELP THEM CONNECT:** Get help from agencies or people specializing in crisis intervention and suicide prevention. Call the **988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline (9-8-8)** or text the **Crisis Text Line (741741)** for help, guidance, and support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Encourage them to save the numbers to their cell phones for future use. In addition, help them reach out to a trusted family member, friend, spiritual advisor, and/or mental health professional for ongoing support. **Call 9-1-1 if there is an immediate life-threatening emergency.**
- **STAY CONNECTED:** Stay in touch with the person after the crisis or after they are discharged from care. Studies show that ongoing, supportive contact plays an important role in preventing suicide.

In addition, participation in trainings such as [Question, Persuade, and Refer \(QPR\)](#), [Mental Health First Aid](#) and [ASIST](#) can teach people how to talk with someone who is thinking of suicide. For information on upcoming trainings, email [info@ctclearinghouse.org](mailto:info@ctclearinghouse.org).

## What Treatment Options And Therapies Are Available?

Effective, evidence-based interventions are available to help people who are at risk for suicide:

- **Brief Intervention Strategies:** Creating a safety plan or crisis response plan - with specific instructions for what to do and how to get help when having thoughts about suicide - can help reduce a person's risk of acting on suicidal thoughts. Staying connected and following up with someone who is at risk for suicide also has been shown to help lower the risk of future suicide attempts. Increasing safe storage of lethal means can help reduce suicide attempts and deaths by suicide.
- **Psychotherapies:** [Cognitive Behavioral Therapy \(CBT\)](#) and [Dialectical Behavioral Therapy \(DBT\)](#) are two forms of psychotherapy that can reduce thoughts of suicide and suicide attempts. [CBT](#) helps people develop new ways of dealing with stressful experiences; they learn to recognize their thought patterns and consider alternative actions when thoughts of suicide arise. [DBT](#) helps individuals recognize when their feelings or actions are disruptive or unhealthy and teaches them skills to help them cope more effectively with upsetting situations.
- **Medication:** Some people may benefit from medication along with psychotherapy. Doctors and individuals who can work with individuals to find the right medication or combination of medications to help reduce their thoughts and feelings of suicide.

**For Emergency Assistance**  
Call 9-1-1 (ambulance, fire, police)

**Connecticut Resources**  
**Connecticut Suicide & Crisis Lifeline**  
Call 2-1-1

**Department of Mental Health and  
Addiction Services (DMHAS)**  
[www.portal.ct.gov/dmhas](http://www.portal.ct.gov/dmhas)

**National Resources**  
**988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline**  
Call 9-8-8

**Crisis Text Line**  
Text "Home" to 741741

**American Foundation for Suicide  
Prevention**  
<https://afsp.org/>

**Substance Abuse and Mental  
Health Services Administration  
(SAMHSA)**  
[www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov)