

Risk Factors and Warning Signs

What leads to suicide?

There's no single cause for suicide. Suicide most often occurs when stressors and health issues converge to create an experience of hopelessness and despair. Depression is the most common condition associated with suicide, and it is often undiagnosed or untreated. Conditions like depression, anxiety and substance problems, especially when unaddressed, increase risk for suicide. Yet it's important to note that most people who actively manage their mental health conditions lead fulfilling lives.

Suicide Warning Signs

Something to look out for when concerned that a person may be suicidal is a change in behavior or the presence of entirely new behaviors. This is of sharpest concern if the new or changed behavior is related to a painful event, loss, or change. Most people who take their lives exhibit one or more warning signs, either through what they say or what they do.



Talk

If a person talks about:

- Killing themselves
- Feeling hopeless
- Having no reason to live
- Being a burden to others
- Feeling trapped
- Unbearable pain



Behavior

Behaviors that may signal risk, especially if related to a painful event, loss or change:

- Increased use of alcohol or drugs
- Looking for a way to end their lives, such as searching online for materials or means
- Withdrawing from activities
- Isolating from family and friends

- Sleeping too much or too little
- Visiting or calling people to say goodbye
- Giving away prized possessions
- Aggression
- Fatigue



Mood

People who are considering suicide often display one or more of the following moods:

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Loss of interest
- Irritability
- Humiliation
- Agitation
- Rage

Suicide Risk Factors

Risk factors are characteristics or conditions that increase the chance that a person may try to take their life.



Health Factors

- Mental health conditions
 - Depression
 - Substance use problems
 - Bipolar disorder
 - Schizophrenia
 - Personality traits of aggression, mood changes and poor relationships
 - Conduct disorder
 - Anxiety disorders
- Serious or chronic health conditions and/or pain
- Traumatic brain injury



Environmental Factors

- Access to lethal means including firearms and drugs
- Prolonged stress, such as harassment, bullying, relationship problems or unemployment
- Stressful life events, which may include a death, divorce or job loss
- Exposure to another person's suicide, or to graphic or sensationalized accounts of suicide



Historical Factors

- Previous suicide attempts
- Family history of suicide
- Childhood abuse, neglect or trauma

Protective Factors for Suicide

Protective factors buffer individuals from suicidal thoughts and behavior. To date, protective factors have not been studied as extensively or rigorously as risk factors. Identifying and understanding protective factors are, however, equally as important as researching risk factors.

Protective Factors

- Effective clinical care for mental, physical, and substance abuse disorders
- Easy access to a variety of clinical interventions and support for help seeking
- Family and community support (connectedness)
- Support from ongoing medical and mental health care relationships
- Skills in problem solving, conflict resolution, and nonviolent ways of handling disputes
- Cultural and religious beliefs that discourage suicide and support instincts for self-preservation

If you are in crisis, please call the **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline** at **1-800-273-TALK (8255)** or contact the **Crisis Text Line** by texting TALK to **741741**.