Warning Signs of Suicide

ONE-PAGE QUICK REFERENCE • Recognize urgency and act on safety concerns

SIGNS THAT REQUIRE ATTENTION

- Talking about wanting to die, being a burden, guilt or shame, unbearable pain, hopelessness, or feeling trapped.
- Looking for ways to die, making a plan, giving away meaningful possessions, or saying goodbye.
- New or escalating withdrawal, agitation, major mood swings, risky behavior, substance use, or sharp changes in sleep.
- Risk is especially concerning when changes are recent, rapidly worsening, or paired with access to lethal means.

WHAT TO DO RIGHT NOW

- ASK directly and calmly: “Are you thinking about suicide?”
- BE THERE: listen without judgment and do not dismiss the person.
- HELP KEEP THEM SAFE: get urgent assistance; reduce access to potentially lethal items only when you can do so safely.
- HELP THEM CONNECT: call/text 988 with them, contact a clinician or trusted supporter; FOLLOW UP after the crisis.

EMERGENCY RULE

- An attempt in progress, imminent threat, severe injury, or medical emergency: call 911. Do not leave the person alone if it is safe to stay.

Important: General educational information only; not diagnosis, treatment, or individualized safety planning. U.S. crisis support: call or text 988. For immediate danger or medical emergencies, call 911.

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WHAT WARNING SIGNS MEAN

No checklist predicts suicide with certainty. A sign warrants conversation and an assessment of urgency, not an assumption about what someone will do. Some people show few obvious signs.

Expressions of being a burden, having no reason to live, or feeling trapped can signal serious emotional pain. Specific preparation, access to a method, or a stated intention raises urgency.

ASKING DIRECTLY IS IMPORTANT

Use clear wording: “Are you thinking about ending your life?” Avoid evasive euphemisms. NIMH notes that asking about suicidal thoughts does not increase them.

Listen and ask whether they have a plan and whether they can stay safe right now. Do not conduct a formal risk assessment yourself; seek trained crisis or emergency help.

WHAT TO AVOID

Do not challenge, shame, lecture, dare, minimize, or promise to keep a suicidal plan secret. Avoid leaving an acutely at-risk person to manage alone.

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HELP KEEP THEM SAFE

If there is immediate danger, call emergency services. If it is safe, remain nearby until help arrives and do not put yourself at risk.

Work with trained responders and supportive people to limit access to weapons, excess medication, or other lethal means. Do not physically confront someone or attempt dangerous removal yourself.

CONNECT AND FOLLOW UP

988 is available in the U.S. by call or text, including for someone worried about another person. A crisis counselor can help think through the next step.

When safe, involve mental-health clinicians and the person's chosen support network. After a crisis, check in at agreed intervals and help with follow-up appointments.

REMEMBER

Anyone can experience suicidal thoughts; shame and silence may make disclosure harder. Compassionate direct questions and timely professional support can make a meaningful difference.

RELIABLE SOURCES AND FURTHER READING

https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/warning-signs-of-suicide

https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/5-action-steps-to-help-someone-having-thoughts-of-suicide

https://988lifeline.org/

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