

- Making a threat of suicide—for example, “I wish I were dead” or “I’m going to end it”
- Expressing hopelessness
- Expressing helplessness
- Expressing worthlessness
- Talking about death
- Having previous suicide attempts
- Seeming depressed, moody, or angry
- Having trouble at school or work
- Abusing alcohol or drugs
- Taking risks.
- Withdrawing from people
- Behaving differently or oddly
- Sleeping poorly
- Having a loss of appetite
- Giving away prized possessions
- Suddenly seeming happy after exhibiting several of the behaviors in this list

### WHAT IS THE TREATMENT?

The treatment of a suicidal person depends on what caused it and how severe the attempt was. Treatment can range from immediate hospitalization to weekly psychotherapy with a licensed mental health professional. It may include antidepressant medication or treatment for drug or alcohol abuse.

### WHAT SHOULD I DO IF SOMEONE IS SUICIDAL?

Take action immediately. Depending on the urgency of the situation, call your doctor, hospital, mental health center, suicide hotline, or police emergency number (911).

### WHERE CAN I GO FOR MORE INFORMATION?

Marcus, Eric. *Why Suicide?: Answers to 200 of the Most Frequently Asked Questions about Suicide, Attempted Suicide, and Assisted Suicide*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996.

### SEE THESE HANDOUTS ON RELATED TOPICS

Building Your Self-Esteem  
 Childhood Trauma  
 Coping with the Illness of Someone You Care About  
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 How People Change  
 Living a Responsible Life  
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 Managing Anxiety  
 Recovering from Loss  
 Relaxation Techniques  
 Resolving Family Conflicts

# Thinking about Suicide

### HOW COMMON IS SUICIDE?

It is reported that suicide, the act of deliberately ending one’s own life, is a cause of death for about 30,000 people (including 5,000 aged 15 to 24) each year in the United States. Since many suicides are not reported as such, the actual number is most likely much higher. Suicide goes unreported because of its stigma or because family members find it too painful to confront the truth.



The rate of suicide in the United States is about 12 per 100,000 people, making it the ninth leading cause of death in the United States during the years 1993 to 1995. According to the American Association of Suicidology, which studies suicide and its prevention, there are between 8 and 20 suicide attempts for each suicide death. This means that anywhere from 240,000 to 600,000 suicide attempts occur each year in the United States. This rate jumps to 200 attempts for every suicide death when young people (15 to 24 years old) are involved. Here are some other facts about suicide:

- In the United States, Nevada has the highest suicide rate.
- More suicides happen in the spring than at other time of the year.
- The most lethal days of the week are Monday and Friday.
- Rich people and poor people alike commit suicide. Suicide is an equal-opportunity killer and is chosen by people from every group imaginable. The most common victims are white males aged 65 and older.
- More men than women have successful suicides, but women have more suicide attempts.
- 60 percent of people who commit suicide do so with guns.

#### WHY DO PEOPLE ATTEMPT SUICIDE?

There are many reasons why people kill themselves, and we often never know why certain individuals choose this route. The following factors seem to play a role in many suicides, but none of them guarantees that a person will end his/her life. Often, it is a combination of factors, unique for each person, that seem to interact with a person's circumstances. These factors include the following:

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**Clinical depression.** This type of depression is much more than just a simple case of the blues; it is severe and debilitating. It may surprise you to know that people who suffer from depression are at the greatest risk for suicide after they begin treatment and begin to feel better. The reason is that when people are severely depressed they may lack the energy to carry out suicide. When they begin to recover and feel better, however, they may regain enough of their energy to carry out the suicide.

**Alcoholism and drug abuse.** These conditions, because they impair judgment, are associated with a higher suicide rate. Over half of all adolescent suicides and suicide attempts are associated with alcohol. When a person is under the influence of alcohol, he/she has fewer inhibitions and may also think and act in ways that would never happen if he/she were sober. Alcoholism and drug abuse create additional stresses in the lives of users and may result in depression and a tendency toward desperate behavior.

**Mental illness.** People with certain disorders such as schizophrenia have a higher risk of suicide.

**Physical illness.** Terminal, age-related, and other illnesses are often factors that contribute to people who commit suicide.

**Feeling hopeless.** Common among people who commit suicide, feelings of hopelessness may be part of clinical depression

or the result of illness or other dire circumstance. When a person feels hopeless, he/she feels trapped and may see suicide as the only way out.

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**Anger.** This emotion motivates some people to commit suicide. After a long, unhappy relationship and years of building anger, such people see suicide as a dramatic way to send a message of retribution.

**Sudden loss.** The shock and grief of a sudden loss—of a person or a job—may precipitate suicide in some people.

**Scandal or extreme embarrassment.** Some people feel so trapped in such a situation that they can think of no way out except for suicide.

#### WHAT ARE THE WARNING SIGNS?

One expert says that 8 out of 10 people who commit suicide give clear warnings that they are considering suicide. Although the following warning signs can be evident in almost everybody at some point in their lives, it is important to be aware of them and take them seriously when you see them.

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