

Preventing Suicide: Signs To Look For

BY [Andre Reid](#) Posted [September 14, 2021](#)

Globally, one in every 100 deaths is the result of suicide and World Suicide Prevention Day (WSPD) is a time for the international community to join together in focusing on the needs of people at risk of suicide, suicide attempt survivors and people bereaved by suicide. Since its inception on September 10, 2003, the day has provided a chance for family and friends, charitable organizations, professionals, politicians, volunteers and community members to collectively promote understanding about suicide along with those impacted by a suicide attempt or loss.

Suicide can affect every one of us with each devastating incident having a profound impact on those affected, both directly and indirectly. However, by raising awareness, reducing the stigma and encouraging well-informed action, we can reduce instances of suicide in our communities. Whether you are a child, a parent, a friend, a colleague or even a neighbour, you can make a difference to someone in their darkest moments. We can all play a role in supporting those experiencing a suicidal crisis or those bereaved by suicide.

A person who is thinking about suicide usually gives clues or signs to those around them so the best prevention is to recognise these warning signs, take them seriously and act on them. Below are some obvious and not so obvious warning signs you should look out for in a suicidal individual:

Primary Warning Signs (these are obvious signs to pay attention to)

- Talking about dying or wanting to die
- Talking about feeling empty, hopeless, or having no way out of problems
- Mentioning strong feelings of guilt and shame
- Talking about not having a reason to live or that others would be better off without them
- Social withdrawal and isolation from family and friends
- Giving away personal items and wrapping up loose ends
- Saying goodbye to friends and family

Secondary Warning Signs (these are not so obvious but are key to note)

• **Any/All unusual changes in behavior.**

These are easy to overlook because the changes may not seem related to depression or hopelessness. Unusual mood swings - someone who is usually kind may become angry and aggressive or someone who has been sad and depressed may suddenly become calm and seemingly happy - are changes to pay attention to.

• **Changes in sleeping patterns.**

A shift in someone's sleeping habits is a sign of depression and if they are feeling suicidal may sleep more than normal, struggling to get out of bed at all. They may also sleep less, experiencing insomnia, while staying up for long hours and then struggle the next day with fatigue. Be aware of these changes and monitor them.

• **Accessing (hidden or obvious) lethal means.**

This is an important warning sign that can be hidden if an individual stockpiles pills without detection. Another potentially strong and very obvious sign could be the purchase of a gun by someone suicidal. Be aware of both of these because without access to either, the risk is reduced significantly.

• **Emotional distance.**

Suicidal persons tend to become detached from people and life in general. Whether socially isolated or not, they may still seem emotionally distant. In fact, acting indifferent in the face of emotional situations may not seem like suicidal behavior, so it is important to pay attention and recognize it as a potential warning sign.

• **Physical and or emotional pain.**

Physical or emotional pain and discomfort are often overlooked as symptoms of depression and suicide. If someone you know complains often of any type of physical pain, be alert to other signs of depression or suicide. If the individual has no easy or suitable explanation for the pain, you should be especially concerned.

All of us can play a role, no matter how small and we may never know what we do that makes a difference. You do not need to tell them what to do or have solutions, but simply making the time and space to listen to someone about their experiences of distress or suicidal thoughts can help. Small talk can save lives and create a sense of connection and hope in somebody who may be struggling. If you notice any of these warning signs in a friend, relative or loved one, encourage them to talk about how they are feeling and to share these concerns with a family member and a mental healthcare professional.

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