

Know the signs:

If you suspect someone you know is having suicidal thoughts, know the warning signs. Most suicidal individuals give some warning of their intentions. The most effective way to prevent a friend or loved one from taking his or her life is to recognize the factors that put people at risk for suicide. Take warning signs seriously and know how to respond. Warning signs might include:

Observable signs of serious depression:

- Unrelenting low mood
- Pessimism
- Hopelessness
- Desperation
- Anxiety, psychological pain and inner tension
- Withdrawal or lack of interest in usual activities
- Sleep problems
- Increased alcohol and/or other drug use
- Recent impulsiveness and taking unnecessary risks
- Threatening suicide or expressing a strong wish to die

Making a plan:

- Giving away prized possessions
- Sudden or impulsive purchase of a firearm
- Obtaining other means of killing oneself such as poisons or medications
- Unexpected rage or anger

If you recognize these signs in a friend or loved one, be willing to listen.

Don't be afraid to ask

Start by telling the person you are concerned and give him/her examples. If he/she is depressed, don't be afraid to ask whether he/she is considering suicide, or if he/she has a particular plan or method in mind. Ask if they have a therapist and/or are taking medication.

Do not attempt to argue someone out of suicide. Rather, let the person know you care, he/she is not alone, suicidal feelings are temporary and depression can be treated. Avoid the temptation to say "You have so much to live for" or "Suicide will hurt your family".

Many people experiencing depression feel overwhelmed by roles and activities related to family, social and work matters and may not feel they have much to live for. Their future may seem unmanageable. Due to feelings of worthlessness or guilt they may believe their family would be better off without them.

During a suicidal crisis it is important that the person feels others are listening and understand their feelings. Once safety is established there will be time to address stressors and concerns impacting their well being.

When it comes to suicide, secrets can be deadly.

If you think one of your friends or classmates may be thinking of killing themselves:

- Never promise to keep someone's thoughts to kill him- or herself a secret
- If you think a person is in danger, you need to tell someone who can intervene
- If you are experiencing suicidal thoughts, it's important for you to tell someone you trust and seek help.

You can be a lifesaver.

You should then become actively involved in encouraging the person to see a physician or mental health professional immediately. Individuals contemplating suicide often don't believe they can be helped, so you may have to do more.

Help the person find a knowledgeable mental health professional or a reputable treatment facility, and take them to the treatment. The Worcester County Health Department offers individual, family and group counseling as well as psychiatric care for Worcester County residents.

If a friend or loved one is threatening, talking about or making plans for suicide, these are signs of an acute crisis. Do not leave the person alone and remove from the vicinity any firearms, drugs or sharp objects that could be used for suicide. Then, call 911 or the Life Crisis Hotline at 410-749-4357 for assistance. Your actions can save a life.