

Risk and Protective Factors for Suicide

Risk factors may be thought of as leading to or being associated with suicide; that is, people “possessing” the risk factor are at a greater potential for suicidal behavior. Protective factors, on the other hand, reduce the likelihood of suicide. They enhance resilience and may serve to counterbalance risk factors. Risk and protective factors may be biopsychosocial, environmental, or sociocultural in nature. Although these categories are somewhat arbitrary, it provides the opportunity to consider these factors from different perspectives.

Biopsychosocial Risk Factors ~

- Mental disorders, particularly mood disorders, schizophrenia, anxiety disorders and certain personality disorders
- Alcohol and substance use disorders
- Hopelessness
- Impulsive and/or aggressive tendencies
- History of trauma or abuse
- Major physical illnesses
- Previous suicide attempt
- Family history of suicide

Environmental Risk Factors ~

- Job or financial loss
- Relational or social loss
- Easy access to lethal means
- Local clusters of suicide that have a contagious influence

Sociocultural Risk Factors ~

- Lack of social support and sense of isolation
- Stigma associated with help-seeking behavior
- Barrier to accessing health care, especially mental health and substance abuse treatment
- Certain cultural or religious beliefs (for instance, the belief that suicide is a noble resolution to a personal dilemma)
- Exposure to, including through the media, and influence of others who have died by suicide

Protective Factors ~

- Effective clinical care for mental, physical and substance use disorders
- Easy access to a variety of clinical interventions and support for help-seeking
- Restricted access to highly lethal means of suicide
- Strong connections to family and community support
- Support through ongoing medical and mental health care relationships
- Skills in problem solving, conflict resolution, and non-violent handling of disputes
- Cultural and religious beliefs that discourage suicide and support self-preservation

Source: Suicide Prevention Resource Center at <http://www.sprc.org>.

Warning Signs of Suicide

Suicide can be prevented. While some suicides occur without any outward warning, most people who are suicidal do give warnings. Prevent the suicide of loved ones by learning to recognize the signs of someone at risk. While there is no single predictor of suicide, there are some common signs to watch out for:

- Threatening to hurt or kill oneself or talking about wanting to hurt or kill oneself
- Looking for ways to kill oneself by seeking access to firearms, pills, or other means
- Talking or writing about death, dying, or suicide when these actions are out of the ordinary for the person
- Feeling hopeless
- Feeling rage or uncontrolled anger or seeking revenge
- Acting reckless or engaging in risky activities – seemingly without thinking
- Feeling trapped, like there's no way out
- Increasing alcohol or drug use
- Withdrawing from friends, family, and society
- Feeling anxious, agitated, or unable to sleep or sleeping all the time
- Experiencing dramatic mood changes
- Seeing no reason for living or having no sense of purpose in life (www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org)

A suicidal person may also:

- Be preoccupied with, or glorify, death or dying
- Have a recent, severe loss (especially a relationship) or threat of a significant loss
- Experience drastic changes in behavior
- Lose interest in school, work, hobbies, or activities that were once pleasurable
- Prepare for death by making out a will (unexpectedly) and final arrangements
- Give away prized possessions
- Have attempted suicide before
- Lose interest in their personal appearance
- Increase their use of alcohol or drugs
- Be faced with a situation of humiliation or failure
- Have a history of violence or hostility
- Have been unwilling to “connect” with potential helpers

Many people at some time in their lives think about contemplating suicide. Most decide to live because they eventually come to realize that crisis is temporary and death is permanent. On the other hand, people having a crisis sometimes perceive their dilemma as inescapable and feel an utter loss of control. These are some of the feelings and thoughts they experience:

- Can't stop the pain
- Can't think clearly
- Can't make decisions
- Can't see any way out
- Can't sleep, eat, or work
- Can't get out of depression
- Can't make the sadness go away
- Can't see a future without pain
- Can't see themselves as worthwhile
- Can't get someone's attention
- Can't see to get control

Source: The American Association of Suicidology at <http://www.suicidology.org>.

Resources

The Statewide Office of Suicide Prevention

<http://www.HelpPromoteHope.com>

The Florida Suicide Prevention Implementation Project

<http://preventsuicide.fmhi.usf.edu>

A site for individuals, schools, coalitions, task forces, faith-based organizations, health providers, and state and system leaders who are interested in taking action to prevent the tragic loss of life from suicide.

The Suicide Prevention Resource Center

<http://www.sprc.org>

A clearinghouse for training materials and state information regarding suicide prevention.

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255)

<http://www.SuicidePreventionLifeline.org>

A 24-hour, toll-free suicide prevention service available to anyone in suicidal crisis. Your call is free and confidential.

The Suicide Prevention Action Network USA

<http://www.spanusa.org>

SPAN USA is the nation's only suicide prevention organization dedicated to leveraging grassroots support among suicide survivors (those who have lost a loved one to suicide) and others to advance public policies that help prevent suicide. The organization was created to raise awareness, build political will, and call for action with regard to creating, advancing, implementing and evaluating a national strategy to address suicide in our nation.

The American Association of Suicidology

<http://www.suicidology.org>

The goal of the American Association of Suicidology (AAS) is to understand and prevent suicide. AAS promotes research, public awareness programs, public education, and training for professionals and volunteers. In addition, AAS serves as a national clearinghouse for information on suicide.

The National Institute of Mental Health

<http://www.nimh.nih.gov>

NIMH is one of 27 components of the National Institute of Health (NIH), the federal government's principal biomedical and behavioral research agency. NIH is part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Suicide Awareness Voice of Education (SAVE)

<http://www.save.org>

The mission of SAVE is to prevent suicide through public awareness and education, eliminate stigma and serve as a resource to those touched by suicide.

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

<http://www.afsp.org>

A national not-for-profit organization exclusively dedicated to understanding and preventing suicide through research and education, and to reaching out to people with mood disorders and those affected by suicide.

National Alliance on Mental Illness, Florida (NAMI, Florida)

<http://www.nami.org>

NAMI is the nation's largest grassroots organization for people with mental illness and their families. NAMI recognizes that the key concepts of recovery, resiliency and support are essential to improving the wellness and quality of life of all persons affected by mental illness. Mental illness should not be an obstacle to a full and meaningful life for persons who live with them. NAMI will advocate at all levels to ensure that all persons affected by mental illness receive the services that they need and deserve in a timely fashion.

The Florida Suicide Prevention Coalition

<http://www.floridasuicideprevention.org>

The mission of the coalition is to collaborate to develop and implement suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention strategies and programs.