

# Beware of suicidal warnings

Suicide deaths are part of a growing problem in Kansas communities, the ninth leading cause of death in Kansas in 1999.

It is not easy to talk or think about suicide. Myth suggests that talking about it causes suicide to happen. The fact is, talking and recognizing risk potential helps prevent suicide.

We all seem to go through a period of feeling down or withdrawing from friends and family at some point. Why might an individual consider taking their own life? Suicide is caused by a combination of risk factors, when the individual may lack or refuse support from family and community. These factors can include:

- Previous attempts. Those who have tried suicide before are at a much higher risk.
- Mental disorders, or mental and substance abuse disorders occurring together.
- Family history. Higher risk exists when a close family member has attempted or completed suicide.
- Stressful life event or loss.
- Easy access to lethal methods, especially guns.
- Incarceration.
- Exposures to others' suicidal behavior. There is evidence of suicide clusters, local "epidemics" of suicide with a contagious influence. These clusters nearly always involve previously disturbed people who learn about the other deaths, but rarely knew the victims personally.

Suicidal behavior may stem from feelings of helplessness. Those who attempt suicide tend to be isolated. They withdraw from friends and from family communication, and are likely to have many stressors: family problems (divorce, remarriage, death of a family member, marital discord), peer problems (loss of friendships) and other



## Home Time

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physical, mental or social challenges.

Everyone should be aware of the warning signs of suicide, and notice whether other risk factors are building. The following warning signs are not in ranked order:

- Depressed mood.
- Substance abuse.
- Frequent episodes of running away, criminal activity or being incarcerated.
- Expressions of suicidal thoughts, or talk of death or the afterlife during moments of sadness or boredom.
- Family loss or instability, significant problems with family members.
- Withdrawal from friends and family.
- No interest in or enjoyment of activities that once were pleasurable.
- Unplanned pregnancy.
- Impulsive, aggressive behavior, frequent expressions of rage.
- Giving away prized possessions.

It can be difficult to know what to do when you learn someone is thinking of suicide. The American Association of Suicidology recommends the following:

- Be direct. Talk openly about suicide.
- Be willing to listen. Allow expression of feelings and accept them.
- Be non-judgmental. Do not de-

bate whether suicide is right or wrong, or feelings are good or bad. Do not lecture on the value of life.

- Get involved. Become available. Show interest and support.
- Do not dare a person to do it.
- Do not act shocked; it will put distance between you.
- Refuse to be sworn to secrecy. Seek help and support.
- Offer hope of possible alternatives.
- Take action. Remove means, such as guns or stockpiled pills.
- Get help from persons or agencies specializing in crisis intervention and suicide prevention, such as a community mental health center, counselor, mental health professional or clergy.

Surprisingly, those who are considering suicide may show a sudden lift in mood after a period of sadness, because they believe they have found a solution to their problem.

A National Suicide Help Line is available 24 hours a day by calling 1-800-SUICIDE. It provides a crisis line staff to talk with individuals who are thinking of suicide.

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