

TAKING THREATS OF SUICIDE SERIOUSLY

Among the many things you can do to help a depressed person who may be considering suicide, most involve simply talking and listening.



Here are some approaches that have worked for others:

EXPRESS EMPATHY AND CONCERN. Acknowledge the reality of the pain and hopelessness the suicidal person is experiencing. Resist the urge to function as a therapist, which can ultimately create more feelings of rejection for the person, who doesn't want to be "told what to do."

DESCRIBE SPECIFIC BEHAVIORS AND EVENTS THAT TROUBLE YOU. If you can explain particular ways a person's behavior has changed, this may help to get communication started.

WORK WITH PROFESSIONALS. Never promise confidentiality if you believe someone is close to suicide. Keep the person's doctor or therapist informed of any thoughts of suicide. If possible, it is best to encourage the person to discuss it with her doctor herself.

STRESS THAT THE PERSON'S LIFE IS IMPORTANT TO YOU AND TO OTHERS. Emphasize in specific terms the ways in which the person's suicide would be devastating to you and others. Share personal stories or pictures of past events.

BE PREPARED FOR ANGER. The person may express anger and feel betrayal by your attempt to prevent his suicide or get him into treatment. Realize that these reactions are caused by the illness and should pass once the person has received the proper treatment.

ALWAYS BE SUPPORTIVE. A person who has thought about or attempted suicide will most likely have feelings of guilt and shame. Assure the person that her actions were caused by an illness that can be treated.

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