

Risk factors and warning signs

While there is no single cause for suicide, there are risk factors and warning signs which may increase likelihood of an attempt.

Learning them can save lives.

What leads to suicide?

There's no single cause for suicide. Suicide most often occurs when stressors and health issues converge to create an experience of hopelessness and despair. Depression is the most common condition associated with suicide, and it is often undiagnosed or untreated. Conditions like depression, anxiety, and substance problems, especially when unaddressed, increase risk for suicide. Yet it's important to note that most people who actively manage their mental health conditions go on to engage in life.

Suicide risk factors

Risk factors are characteristics or conditions that increase the chance that a person may try to take their life.

Risk factor: Health

- Mental health conditions
 - Depression
 - Substance use problems
 - Bipolar disorder
 - Schizophrenia
 - Personality traits of aggression, mood changes and poor relationships
 - Conduct disorder
 - Anxiety disorders
- Serious physical health conditions including pain
- Traumatic brain injury

Risk factor: Environmental

- Access to lethal means including firearms and drugs
- Prolonged stress, such as harassment, bullying, relationship problems or unemployment
- Stressful life events, like rejection, divorce, financial crisis, other life transitions or loss
- Exposure to another person's suicide, or to graphic or sensationalized accounts of suicide

Risk factor: Historical

- Previous suicide attempts
- Family history of suicide
- Childhood abuse, neglect or trauma

Suicide warning signs

Something to look out for when concerned that a person may be suicidal is a change in behavior or the presence of entirely new behaviors. This is of sharpest concern if the new or changed behavior is related to a painful event, loss, or change. Most people who take their lives exhibit one or more warning signs, either through what they say or what they do.

Warning sign: Talk

If a person talks about:

- Killing themselves
- Feeling hopeless
- Having no reason to live
- Being a burden to others
- Feeling trapped
- Unbearable pain

Warning sign: Behavior

Behaviors that may signal risk, especially if related to a painful event, loss or change:

- Increased use of alcohol or drugs
- Looking for a way to end their lives, such as searching online for methods
- Withdrawing from activities
- Isolating from family and friends
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Visiting or calling people to say goodbye
- Giving away prized possessions
- Aggression
- Fatigue

Warning sign: Mood

People who are considering suicide often display one or more of the following moods:

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Loss of interest
- Irritability
- Humiliation/Shame
- Agitation/Anger
- Relief/Sudden Improvement