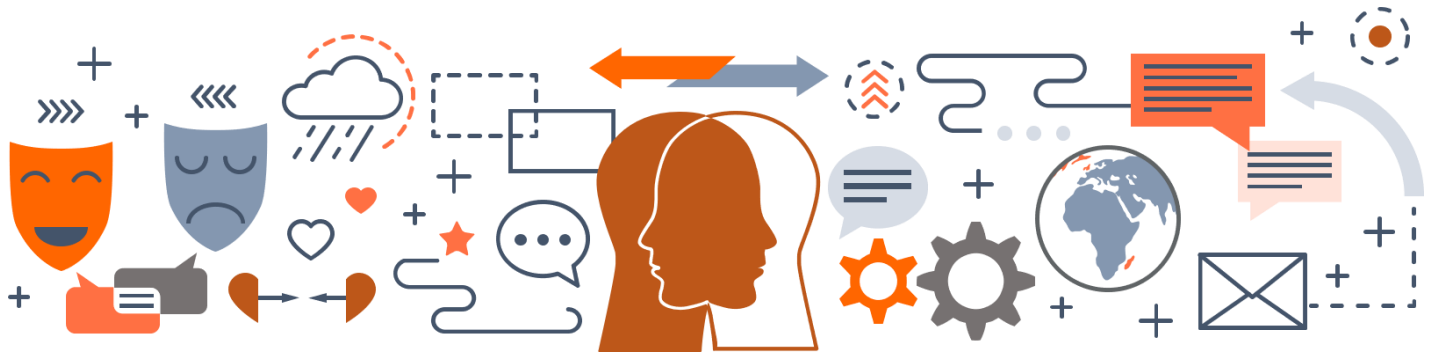


## Preventing Suicide: Dare to Intrude



Suicide has a terrible impact every year. Last year, there were over 200,000 suicides globally, and 47,000 suicides in the United States alone. Suicide rates are increasing during the pandemic as well, as people are isolated from their support network and are unable to use coping skills that have previously worked for them. What makes every suicide such a tragedy that goes beyond the terrible loss of life and the grief experienced by loved ones is that every suicide that occurs was preventable.

Suicide is in the public consciousness. When there are news stories where celebrities such as Robin Williams or Kate Spade take their own lives, everyone shares a sense of loss. Adolescents have taken their own lives on popular social media platforms. There are songs about suicide and movies where lead characters die by their own hand. There is even an entire television series dedicated to following a teenage girl's life events up until her tragic suicide.

### **We don't want to talk about it (but we should)**

Even with all the awareness and attention, it is something we find difficult to discuss with one another. It is even more overwhelming to ask a friend or loved one if they are ok, and whether they are considering harming themselves. Though we care, we are afraid to intrude. Perhaps we will insult the person. They may become angry or stop talking to us. Would asking about it make it worse? Perhaps we would even accidentally plant the idea? While these fears are understandable, there are some important facts to consider:

- Asking about suicide does not increase risk. Recent research informs us that asking someone if they have thought or are thinking about taking their own lives reduces the likelihood that someone will. This is true with adults and asking an adolescent had even more positive results.
- Perhaps we wonder if they are just seeking attention. It is best to treat concerns related to suicide seriously. It is impossible to know the statistics, but people die from suicide attempts frequently even when they did not actually mean to kill themselves. A person making statements or displaying warning signs may or may not be attention seeking, but what they are clearly doing is desperately asking for help. They

- Most people that survived a suicide attempt stated afterwards that they felt like they did not have anyone they could speak to about what was happening in their lives.
- Suicide attempt survivors state that anyone that shows compassion and empathy is helpful. You don't need to be an expert or know exactly what to say. Simply showing someone you care enough to really ask how they are doing can be enough.
- Loved ones left behind after a suicide experience powerful grief and pain, but these family members and friends report experiencing another emotion even more, and that is guilt. Guilt that they did not know what was occurring in their loved one's life, or that things were so bad. Guilt that they did not intervene. Guilt that they did not dare to intrude.

### **Be mindful of red flags**

When someone is struggling with depression, feeling hopeless, or is having suicidal thoughts, we as someone in their life that cares about them may start to pick up on signals that something is wrong. If you start to notice these behaviors and warning signs, it may be time to dare to intrude:

- **They may talk about it overtly:** A person struggling with life may clearly state that they are struggling, and may make statements such as "I want to die" or "My life is not worth living."
- **Statements may be more subtle:** They may speak about guilt, regrets, or not wanting to be a burden to loved ones. They may talk about feeling trapped, or about how things are never going to get better.
- **They stop doing things they used to enjoy:** Someone contemplating taking their life begins to cease the activities that they get enjoyment and support from. This is also a sign of depression. They may leave a sports team, stop having weekly coffee with friends, cease painting or other arts, or stop attending their weekly bible study. They are withdrawing from life.
- **They may attempt to atone for past wrongs, or to "make things right":** Guilt and regret can be strong motivators for suicide. As an individual contemplates ending their life, they may want to atone for certain past regrets before they do so. This can include apologies, confessions, or attempting to fix a past wrong.
- **Starting new high risk or dangerous activities:** A person struggling with life may not actively take their own life but may begin engaging in high risk behaviors that they consciously or unconsciously hope will end in their death. This could include driving recklessly, drinking and substance abuse, or other high-risk behaviors.
- **Making plans for when they are gone:** A friend or loved may begin planning for their life to end by giving away precious belongings, especially sentimental ones. They may suddenly write or change a will. It is especially troubling if someone you are concerned about makes plan to have a loved one provided for or gives away a beloved pet.
- **Appearing to struggle, and then suddenly stating everything has gotten better:** When an individual reaches a decision about taking their own life, they may appear to be at peace after a long

struggle. Their difficult situation may remain unchanged, but they are no longer appear to be struggling with

The most important warning sign that a loved one may be in trouble is your own instinct. You know this person, and their typical behaviors. You know how they react to life. If something is bothering you or concerning to you, take a chance and reach out. Find out how they are doing and be prepared not to accept the first answer. Push if you are worried. Dare to intrude.

### Useful resources

<https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>

<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/warning-signs-of-suicide/index.shtml>

National Suicide Lifeline Phone Number: 1-800-273-8255

Crisis Text Line: 741741

Contact Ulliance for free, confidential support and assistance. You are not alone.



**Ulliance provides no cost, confidential, short term counseling  
for you & your family.**

Call us- we're here to help **800.448.8326**