You could save a Life today

A Resource to Reduce Death by Suicide

Mt. Pleasant Area community foundation

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**ISABELLA COUNTY HELP LINE**

989-772-2918
Purpose of this booklet

- To update the community on the frequency of suicide and suicide attempts
- To encourage open communication about suicide
- To educate people on signs of suicide risk
- To educate people on what they can say or do to help prevent a suicide
- To educate people on who else they can contact to help prevent a suicide
- To advocate for suicide prevention services

• suicidal feelings are temporary
• depression can be treated
• problems can be solved
What is Suicide?

Suicide is death that occurs when an individual intentionally ends his or her own life. Although people may not talk about suicidal thoughts, there are often warning signs, behaviors, or actions that can indicate suicidal thoughts or intent.

Fear of being blamed, feeling uncomfortable, and even feeling afraid of being hospitalized may keep people from voicing their suicidal thoughts.

Research has suggested that there is a link between suicide and depression and/or substance abuse.

For many of those who survive an attempt at suicide, the underlying causes remain.

Each one of us could be at risk for suicide depending on what is happening in our lives, who notices our situation, and who reaches out or responds to a request for help.

Remember: The risk of suicide may be greatest as the depression lifts.

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Myths and Facts

**Myth:** People who feel suicidal are fully intent on dying. Nothing others do or say can help.

**Fact:** Suicide is preventable. Most people with suicidal thoughts or impulses desperately want to live; they are just unable to see alternatives to their problems.

**Myth:** Suicide happens without warning.

**Fact:** There are almost always warning signs, but others are often unaware of the significance of the warnings or unsure what to do.

**Myth:** People who talk about suicide do not commit suicide.

**Fact:** Most people who die by suicide have talked about or given definite warning signs of their suicidal intentions.

**Myth:** Improvement in a person who is suicidal means the danger is over.

**Fact:** Many suicides occur several months after the beginning of improvement, when a person has energy to act on suicidal thoughts.

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Myth: Suicide is more common in lower socio-economic groups.
Fact: Suicide cuts across social and economic boundaries.

Myth: Young people are more likely than old people to die by suicide.
Fact: People 65 and older kill themselves at a higher rate than those aged 15-24.

Myth: Asking "Are you thinking about suicide?" may trigger a person to make a suicide attempt.
Fact: Asking direct, caring questions about suicide will often minimize a person's anxiety and act as a deterrent to suicidal behavior.

From:
http://www.nhchc.org/ShelterHealth/ToolKitD/D9

SuicideMythsandFacts.pdf (National Health Care for the Homeless Council, July 22, 2011)
Who are we losing to suicide?

- 80% of those who die by suicide in the U.S. are male.
- The U.S. male suicide rate is 4.2 times greater than the female rate.
- 84% of those who die by suicide in the U.S are White Non-Hispanic.
- U.S. residents age 70 and older have the highest suicide rate and are 14% of suicides. Their rate is 2.1 times greater than the rate for 15 to 19 year olds.

Above data for suicides 1999 through 2005 is from the United States Suicide Fact Sheet published by the Suicide Prevention Resource Center, www.sprc.org.

Relevant Facts

- Suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death among college age individuals.
- Most teen suicides occur at home during the after-school hours.
- Suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death among American Indians age 15-34.
- Women attempt suicide 47% more often than men.
When you fear someone may kill themselves

Most people give some warning of their suicidal intentions. The most effective way to prevent a friend or loved one from killing themselves is to recognize when the person is at risk, take the warning signs seriously, and know how to respond. The depression and emotional crises that so often precede suicides are— in most cases— both recognizable and treatable.

- Suicide threats and attempts must be taken seriously.
- 75% of all persons who attempt suicide give some warning.
- Ask directly and persistently about self-harm intentions.
- Take the initiative to ask what is troubling them and encourage them to talk about it.
- The person you care about is more apt to seek professional help if you assist them in making connections or accompany them.

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How do we know someone needs help?

...by learning to recognize the signs of someone at risk, taking those signs seriously, and knowing how to respond to them.

Signs:

- **Talking about dying** - any mention of dying, disappearing, shooting oneself, or other types of intentional self-harm.
- **Recent loss** - death, divorce, separation, broken relationship, loss of job, money, status, self-confidence, self-esteem, loss of religious faith, loss of interest in friends, sex, hobbies, activities previously enjoyed.
- **Change in personality** - sad, withdrawn, irritable, anxious, tired, indecisive, apathetic.
- **Change in behavior** - can’t concentrate on school, work, routine tasks.
- **Change in sleep patterns** - insomnia, often with early waking or oversleeping, nightmares.
- **Change in eating habits** - loss of appetite, overeating or sudden gain or loss of weight.
- **Diminished sexual interest** - impotence, menstrual abnormalities (often missed periods).
- **Fear of losing control** - “going crazy”, harming self or others.
- **Low self-esteem** - feeling worthless, shame, overwhelming guilt, self-hatred, “everyone would be better off without me”.
- **No hope for the future** - believing things will never get better; that nothing will ever change.
- **Use of drugs and/or alcohol** - any kind of change in use behaviors; especially an increase in the amount used or types of substances used.

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Most suicides 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, taking those signs seriously, and knowing how to respond to them.

- **Withdrawal from people** - especially close friends, family and/or favorite activities.

- **Unnecessary risk taking** - making dangerous or risky choices such as playing with firearms.

- **Recent impulsiveness** - taking risks that one would not typically take, buying expensive gifts or “big ticket purchases”.

- **Making a plan** - giving away prized possessions, sudden or impulsive purchase of a firearm or obtaining other means of killing oneself such as poisons or medications.

- **Unexpected rage or anger** - where the individual may explode or become angry out of proportion to the event or situation.

- **Unexplainable lifting of mood** - may signal that the individual has made a decision to kill themselves.

- **Observable signs of serious depression** - unrelenting low mood, pessimism, hopelessness, haplessness, desperation, anxiety, psychic pain & inner tension.
P.L.A.I.D. P.A.L.S.

Things to look for when assessing potential risk...

Plan - Do they have one?
Lethality - Is it lethal? Can they die?
Availability - Do they have the means to carry it out?
Illness - Do they have a mental or physical illness?
Depression - Chronic or specific incident(s)?

Previous attempts - How many? How recently?

Alone - Are they alone?
Do they have a support system? Partner?
Are they alone right now?

Loss - Have they suffered a loss?
Death, job, relationship, self esteem?

Substance Abuse (or use) - Drugs, alcohol, medicine? Current, chronic?

If your friend or loved one is depressed, don’t be afraid to ask whether he or she is considering “killing themselves” or “wanting to die”, or even if they have a particular plan or method in mind.

Do not attempt to argue anyone out of killing themselves. Rather, let the person know you care and understand and that he or she is not alone, that suicidal feelings are temporary, that depression can be treated, and that problems can be solved.

Avoid the temptation to say, “You have so much to live for”, or “Your suicide will hurt your family”.
What you can do in an emergency

If you are concerned that there is an immediate threat that your friend or loved one may kill themselves:

• Call 911

• Take your friend or loved one to an emergency room

• Do not leave them alone until help is available

• Remove any firearms, drugs, or sharp objects that could be used in a suicide attempt

• If the above options are unavailable, call your local emergency number or the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255)

Hospitalization may be indicated and may be necessary at least until the crisis abates.

People who are feeling suicidal are often hesitant to seek help and may run away from or avoid it after the initial contact unless there is support for ongoing care.

Some of the information on this page was taken from the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention Website (http://www.afsp.org/ and click on “about suicide”) on September 18, 2008.
What can be done to reduce suicide risk?

Who Can Help?

Suicide is a widespread tragedy. Most people can help in some way. Some groups of people have a greater responsibility to be knowledgeable about suicide and suicide interventions. Examples of those groups are:

1. **Leaders of informal groups**, e.g. bridge clubs, football pool organizers, the parents in the home where teens and children tend to gather

2. **Organizers and leaders of formal groups**, e.g. Scout leaders, Little League coaches, Sunday school teachers, school organization advisors and coaches, formal mentors, clergy, supervisors

3. **Direct Service Providers**, e.g. bus drivers, Meals on Wheels delivery persons, professional, office receptionists

Communities can Reduce Suicide Risk

1. Encourage schools to support suicide awareness & prevention education.

2. Educate public media about how to provide information related to suicide in a manner that is ethical & sensitive.

3. Advocate for funding of suicide prevention services such as hotlines & crisis centers.

4. Inform community members about available resources & educational opportunities.

*Living Works Education 4303D 11 St SE Calgary, Alberta Canada T2G4X1*  
www.livingworks.org

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Individuals can impact suicide rates in communities

- Examine personal attitudes about suicide & look for ways to address stigma surrounding suicide.
- Talk to children & teens about suicide & encourage others to do so.
- Educate yourself by attending trainings.
- Talk to people to raise awareness.
- Learn how you can help.
- Encourage others to seek help.
Resources

Local resources:

• Dial 911 for immediate assistance
• Dial 211 for information on local resources
  www.211nemichigan.org
• Listening Ear 24/7 Helpline
  989-772-2918
  http://www.listeningear.com
• Community Mental Health for Central Michigan
  989-772-5938 http://www.cmhcm.org/
• Women’s Aid 24-Hour Crisis Line
  989-772-9168
• Woodland Hospice & Morey Bereavement Center
  989-773-6137 (survivors of suicide support)

State Resources:

• Suicide Prevention Resource Center
  Michigan information
  http://webdev.sprc.org/stateinformation/statepages/showstate.asp?stateID=22
• University of Michigan Depression Center
  www.depressioncenter.org

National Resources:

CRISIS LINES

• National Suicide Prevention LifeLine
  1-800-273-TALK (8225)
  www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org
• Kristin Brooks Hope Center Hopeline
  1-800-GRAD-HLP (1-800-472-3457)
  http://www.hopeline.com/
• The Trevor Lifeline (LGBTQ)
  1-866-488-7386
  http://www.thetrevorproject.org/
• Veterans Crisis Line
  1-800-273-8255 Press 1
  http://www.veteranscrisisline.net/

ORGANIZATIONS

• American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
  www.afsp.org/
• Suicide Prevention Resource Center (SPRC) www.sprc.org
• SPRC Newsletter: The Spark www.sprc.org/news-events/
The Isabella County Suicide Prevention Committee has developed this booklet as a part of the following:

**PLAN TO REDUCE DEATH BY SUICIDE**

**Goal:** Reduce death by suicide in Isabella County, Michigan, by making information and resources readily available.

**Objective #1:** Educate community members about suicide: including prevalence, causes, signs, accurate reporting, strategies to reduce the likelihood of self-harm, prevention and intervention services.

**Objective #2:** Increase awareness and use of local, state and national 24-hour crisis intervention services.

**Objective #3:** Increase awareness and use of existing services for suicide survivors.

**Objective #4:** Encourage participation by a diverse representation of community members in activities to reduce death by suicide in Isabella County.

**Objective #5:** Expand the number of natural gatekeepers who are trained to recognize signs of possible suicide and to connect the person with someone who can help.

For more information, for additional copies or to provide feedback on the usefulness of this booklet, or to participate in the activities of the Isabella County Suicide Prevention Committee contact the Program Director at Community Mental Health for Central Michigan, 301 South Crapo Street, Mount Pleasant, Michigan 48858, Phone (989) 772-5938.