

HOLDING ON TO LIFE!

Helping Our Friends. Helping Ourselves.

Introduction

Suicide can be an emotionally difficult topic; particularly if your life has been affected by your own thoughts of suicide or the suicidal thoughts, behaviours, attempts, or death of others.

Pause. Breathe deeply. And congratulate yourself for having the courage to read about suicide.

General Information

Suicide is less about death, and more about:

- Spirit sickness
- Wanting the pain to end
- Coping strategy
- Communicating

Suicide is a choice.... other choices are available.



Warning Signs:

Warning signs can be found in all four quadrants of the Medicine Wheel.

Mental (Mind)

Fantasizing about suicide, death, or killing
Self-destructive or self-harm
Confused thinking
Not being able to concentrate

Emotional (Feelings)

| | |
|-------------|-----------|
| Hopeless | Helpless |
| Sad | Depressed |
| Crying | Lonely |
| Mood swings | Worries |
| Anxious | Guilt |

Physical (Body)

Talking or joking about death
Drawing pictures, writing, reading about death/suicide
Saying "goodbye"
Giving things away; writing a will
Dropping out of activities; isolating
Changes in eating, sleeping, energy
Increased use of alcohol or drugs
Fascination with weapons; obtaining a weapon or other things to hurt self
High-risk behaviour; running away
Previous suicide attempts

Spiritual (Beliefs)

Talking or asking questions about suicide, death and the afterlife
Believing life is meaningless
Having no purpose in being alive
Believing you are nobody
Believing you are worthless

You may hear or make statements like

"I am going to kill myself"
"I just want to die"
"Nobody would miss me if I was dead"
"I wish I was dead"

Triggers:

Triggers typically are stressful events that occur, or that a person fears will occur; and that result in thoughts of suicide. Triggers increase feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, loss and being alone.

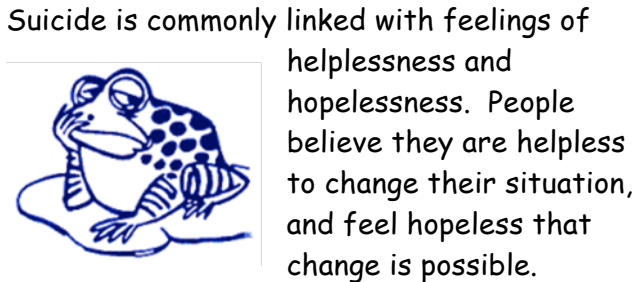
Examples of triggers include:

Arguments with parents, family members, boy/girlfriends
Failing something important
Being bullied/Racism
Death of a family member or friend

Being physically, sexually or emotionally assaulted/Seeing abuser
Anniversary dates of previous deaths

Common feelings:

People who are suicidal may feel a lot of things or nothing at all.



Suicide is commonly linked with feelings of helplessness and hopelessness. People believe they are helpless to change their situation, and feel hopeless that change is possible.

Often some form of loss has occurred - the end of a romantic relationship, someone dies, loss of a friendship, failing something special, loss of a dream, faith, or culture.

Most people who consider suicide feel alone and think that no one understands or cares about them.

What if it is my friend who is suicidal?

How do I know?

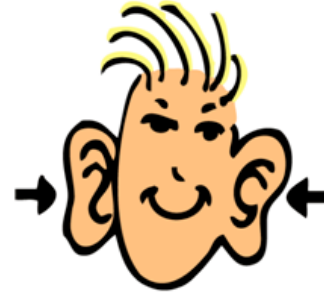
The only way to know for sure if someone is considering suicide is to ask! This can be difficult and scary but it is worth it --- "Are you thinking about suicide?" "Do you want to kill yourself?" "Are you thinking about dying?" --- are all ways to ask the question.

Why do I have to ask?

Just as this is a difficult topic for you, so it is for the person at risk of suicide. Usually the person who is considering suicide thinks no one understands. For some, even the thought of suicide is scary. Shame plays a big role - sometimes people are too ashamed to admit they are considering suicide.

By asking about suicide you are letting them know you care, you are worried about them, you are willing to talk about suicide, and talking about suicide won't scare you off.

What do I do if they are considering suicide?



LISTEN. The biggest thing is to listen to your friend. Let them talk about their thoughts and feelings of suicide. Let them talk about why life is so awful

and what is bothering them the most. Talking helps.

Why does talking help?

One of the biggest reasons people think about suicide is because they feel alone. By talking with the person who is considering suicide you are letting them know you care and that they are not alone.

Is there something more I need to do?

GET HELP! Don't try and do this on your own. Your friend may want you to keep this a secret. Don't! Better to have them alive and angry, then dead with their secret safe.

Get other trusted adults involved. This may be an Elder, grandmother or grandfather, aunt or uncle, school counsellor or teacher, coach, health worker, or wellness worker.

The greater the risk --- the faster you get others involved. Someone who knows how they want to suicide, has a detailed plan, and has started to collect what they need cannot be left alone! Call someone right away or take your friend or family member to a trusted adult.

If your friend or family member refuses to get help --- get help anyhow! Talk to a supportive adult right away. If they are not helpful, find someone else. Keep looking until you find someone to help!

But, what if it is me who is suicidal?



Sometimes events in life cause us to become very sad or worried. Things happen that we regret, or, things that we wished would happen don't occur. Talk to some one! Things

may not get better right away, but they do get better.

What stops me from seeking help?

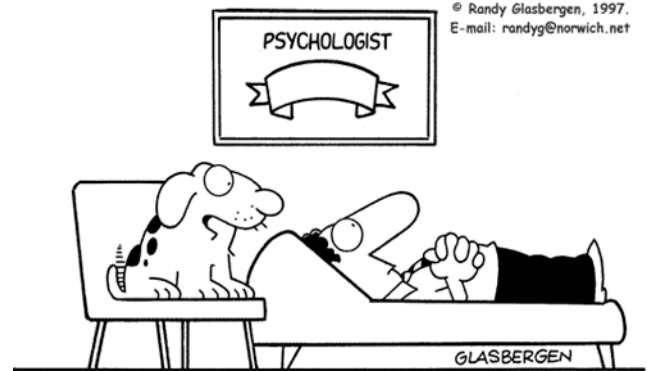
- Embarrassment or shame
- Thinking no one can help
- Shy
- Possibly depression - you can't get motivated, or feel too sad to reach out for help
- Fear that people won't believe you or will laugh at you
- Scared of others finding out
- Worried about what others will think if they knew

Who do I talk to?

Seeking help is a sign of courage, strength and wisdom! Often people don't want to talk to anyone, or only want to talk to their friends. Friends may want to help but not know what to do. Even if a friend thinks they know what to do, suicide is too big of a problem to handle alone. Seek out a trusted adult such as a wellness worker or counsellor.

Why talk to a counsellor?

Speaking with a counsellor is about "you time". You don't have to be a friend. You don't have to worry about what the other person will think, or seeing the person at school or at work. Talking to a counsellor lets you focus on you.



© Randy Glasbergen, 1997.
E-mail: randyg@norwich.net

"My therapy is quite simple: I wag my tail and lick your face until you feel good about yourself again."

A counsellor can support you by asking useful questions that help you to handle painful memories and feelings. Counsellors will build on your strengths, help with problem solving, communication skills, and developing new coping strategies.

What other supports are out there?

During business hours (typically Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.)

Doctors School services
Youth & Family Workers
Health & Wellness services

24 hours:

Hospitals; Emergency services

Local crisis line

1-800 SUICIDE 1-800-784-2433

Vancouver Crisis Line 604-872-3311

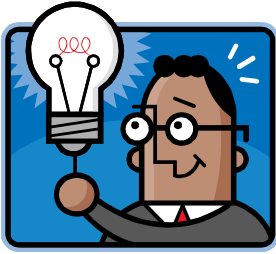
Kids Help Phone 1-800-668-6868

www.youthinbc.com

www.acymh.ca/index.php (Aboriginal Child & Youth Mental Health website. Provides information and direct links to local services.)

Lifelong:

| | |
|----------------|----------------|
| Culture | Faith |
| Family Members | Support groups |
| Elders | Friends |
| Pets | |



Safety Plan

Whether it is you or your friend who is struggling with suicide, having a safety plan helps.

On a piece of paper or the back of a business card write the answers to the following:

1. Three things I do to have fun.
2. Friends I can call when starting to feel sad or worried.
3. Trusted adults I can call if I don't feel better after talking with my friends.
4. Somewhere I can go to be safe.
5. Cultural supports (like an elder); or professionals (like a youth worker, school staff, counsellor, doctor)
6. Crisis lines and websites
7. Local emergency services



Having a Safety Plan let's you know what you are going to do when you feel unsafe.

When you *begin* to feel sad, worried, blue....

- Start at #1.
- If #1 doesn't help, then do #2.
- If you are still thinking about suicide, then do #3.

- Continue with #4, #5, and #6 as needed.
- If you have done #1 to #6 and still are thinking about suicide or feeling like you want to kill yourself, then call your local emergency service - such as 911 or fire department - or go to the hospital.

Medicine Wheel

Previously you read about warning signs in each quadrant of the Medicine Wheel - Mental, Physical, Emotional and Spiritual.

What one thing can you do in each quadrant to keep healthy:

- Mental (ex: Imagine favourite a place. Read a book. Sit in the sun.)
- Physical (ex: Walk. Carve. Fly a kite. Draw. Weave. Pet a dog.)
- Emotional (ex: Sing. Smile in a mirror. Laugh. Tell someone you love them.)
- Spiritual (ex: Pray. Attend a sweat. Drum. Visit an elder. Watch a child.)

We are the healthiest when our Medicine Wheel is balanced - equal energy being put into each quadrant.

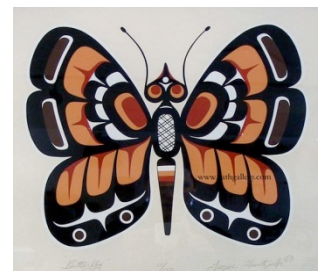
REMEMBER

You will get through this.

You can stay alive.
Gradually, life will get better.

You are capable & strong.

You can make a life worth living!



Judy M. (Davies) North, M.A.

J.NorthConsulting@gmail.com

``Finding Hope in Times of Crisis``