



## Raising awareness — September 10 is World Suicide Prevention Day

Individual experiences vary, but people who are considering suicide usually report feeling hopeless, worthless, agitated and/or overwhelmed, among other strong emotions. While the feelings the person is going through are intense, they usually are temporary — and treatable with professional help.

### **Who's at risk for suicide?**

Suicide is a global phenomenon that affects people in all regions of the world. In fact, it is one of the leading causes of death worldwide, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). Each year, more than 700,000 people die by suicide — that's about one in every 100 deaths. And, for each suicide, there are more than 20 suicide attempts.<sup>1</sup>

Situational or chronic mental health disorders are often linked to a person's suicidal thoughts or attempts. Globally, WHO estimates more than 264 million people of all ages have depression, which also is the leading cause of disability worldwide and a disorder that can lead to suicide.<sup>2</sup> However, not all people with mental illness contemplate suicide.

People who do not have a history of mental illness also might consider and attempt suicide.

### **Risk factors and warning signs**

Factors that could put a person at risk for suicide include:

- Previous suicide attempt(s)
- Mental illness, particularly depression
- Alcohol or substance use disorder
- Stress and crises, such as financial or legal problems
- Chronic pain or physical illness
- Severe emotional distress, such as from war, conflict, disaster, physical or sexual violence, abuse, loss of a loved one
- Social isolation
- Discrimination, bullying, especially due to gender identity or sexual orientation
- Family history

Most people who die by suicide exhibit verbal and behavioral warning signs before doing so. These may include: talking about wanting to die or threatening to kill oneself, feeling trapped or hopeless or having no reason to live; looking for ways to kill oneself; increasing use of alcohol or drugs; showing rage or talking about seeking revenge; giving away valued possessions, or writing a will; withdrawing from loved ones; sleeping too much or too little; and experiencing extreme mood swings.

### **Helping someone who's at risk**

Important: If you fear a person is in immediate danger of harming themselves, do not leave them alone. Reach out for professional help — contact emergency services, a crisis line, or a health care provider.

If you are concerned a loved one is considering suicide, discreetly let them know of your concern and start a conversation to encourage them to seek professional help from a clinician or a local prevention resource or support group. Listen to what they say, and offer to help them find a resource and/or to go with them as support. From there, keep in touch with them and ask how they're doing. If need be, reiterate your concern and again encourage them to seek professional help.

### **Helping yourself cope**

Losing someone you care about to suicide can be — in a word — devastating. It's common to feel overwhelmed, shocked and grief-stricken. It's also common to feel a host of other emotions, including anger, confusion, guilt, shame and relief. The reality is, there is no right or wrong way to feel, because everyone — whoever or wherever they are — experiences loss differently. As hard as it is, in time and with support, you can begin to heal and feel better.

Try to remember you are not alone, and you do not have to go through this alone. Ask for support and accept help from trusted friends and family. Many people also find survivor support groups helpful.

Especially if you have been unable to complete day-to-day activities, are struggling difficult emotions, or have felt emotionally numb for several weeks, seek professional help.

#### **Sources:**

1. World Health Organization. Suicide. [who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/suicide](https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/suicide). Accessed March 30, 2022.
2. World Health Organization. Depression is common. [ho.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/depression](https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/depression). Accessed March 30, 2022.

### **Spotting the signs and symptoms of substance use disorder**

International Recovery Day is September 30

Sometimes it is tough to tell, but there are warning signs that may indicate a loved one who's using drugs and alcohol may have a problem.

Warning signs can include sudden shifts in mood, difficulty getting along with others, changes in job or school performance, irritability and depression. The hard part is many of those signs might be explained by other causes. So, it can be important to look for additional warning signs, like:

- Changes in relationships with friends and family, hanging out with a new crowd
- Avoiding eye contact, locking doors, having secret phone calls
- Going out at night but won't say where
- Disappearing for hours or days at a time
- Slurred speech, clumsy movements
- Missing and/or hidden alcohol or pills
- Missing cash or possessions (especially things that can be sold easily, like jewelry)

While the signs may differ depending on the substance used, if any of these signs sound familiar, substance use may be the issue. Keep in mind, substance use disorders can affect people regardless of age, sex, sexuality, race, marital status, place of residence, income level or lifestyle.

If you're worried about someone's alcohol or drug use, talk to them. You cannot fix their disorder, but you can be supportive and encourage them to get help.

Start by telling them you're concerned and tell them why (moods, missing pills, empty bottles, etc.), but don't accuse or shame them. Keep calm, even if they get upset with you. Let them know you want them to get better — and remind help is available. Encourage them to get in touch with a health care professional, employee assistance program (EAP) or a substance use counselor who can assess their situation and, if necessary, guide them to a treatment program, depending on their individual needs.

### **Getting help**

While the person may be hesitant to seek help, know that treatment programs offer organized and structured services with individual, group and family therapy for people with alcohol and drug use disorders. Depending on the severity of the person's substance use disorder, options may include digital/virtual, peer services, outpatient counseling or facility-based treatment.

Do not give up hope if the first treatment is not fully successful. Some people may need to go through treatment a number of times before their disease goes into remission.

Part of the recovery plan should include learning about the relapse process — returning to the use of alcohol or drugs after a period of abstinence — and devising a plan to help address it. Relapse clues, or warning signs, may relate to changes in your behavior, attitudes, feelings, thoughts or a combination of these. Be on the alert if changes occur and to examine whether the individual may be in the process of relapsing.

Each community has its own resources. Some common referral sources that are often listed online or in phone directories, include:

- Community drug hotlines
- Local emergency health clinics, or community treatment services
- City/local health departments
- local alcoholic or narcotic support groups, Hospitals

## **Tips for cultivating strength and joy**

Whatever you're going through, it's important to do what you can to help support yourself. Here are some "back to the basics" ways to begin:

### **(Re)build a stronger foundation**

One of the best mental health boosters and stress busters is regular exercise. Even five, 10 or 15 minutes here and there will add up. Exercise helps make your body stronger, manage your weight and reduce health risks, including cardiovascular disease, Type 2 diabetes and some cancers. It helps improve your thinking, learning and judgment skills, and reduces your risk of depression and anxiety. It also helps you sleep better and improves your overall quality of life.

Likewise, eating nutritious foods offers many health and well-being benefits, including boosted immunity. As a reminder, a "healthy eating" plan stays within your daily calorie needs, while emphasizing fruits, vegetables and whole grains, and including a variety of proteins. It's also low in saturated fats, trans fats, cholesterol, sodium and added sugars.

Getting enough sleep improves your mental, emotional and physical well-being. As far as sleep, adults generally need seven or more hours of quality sleep per night for the best health and well-being during every 24-hour period.

### **(Re)calibrate your outlook**

A growing body of research shows that positive thinking is connected to better health. While it remains unclear exactly how this connection works, researchers believe it's because when you feel more positive, you are less stressed. Stress can contribute or even lead to a range of physical and mental health conditions, including common colds, digestive issues, high blood pressure, anxiety, depression and more.

Part of thinking more positively is to keep things in perspective. It helps to think about the good things that have happened to you and to those you care about for perspective — and, in tough times, remembering things can be good again.

### **(Re)fortify your foundation**

One of the best things you can do to prepare for and cope with tough times is to build your resilience. Bolstering resilience generally entails:

- Building connections with trustworthy, compassionate and supportive people
- Taking care of your own health and wellness needs, so you are more physically, mentally and emotionally fit
- Creating and finding a sense of purpose, such as by setting and pursuing goals, and being solution-oriented
- Empowering healthy thinking by keeping things in perspective, accepting change and maintaining an optimistic outlook

## **(Re)discover joy**

To take care of yourself, it's important to take time to relax, restore and revitalize. Taking a break and letting yourself be present outside of the stress and urgency of tough times or everyday life can help you feel more energetic and more optimistic overall. It depends on what you enjoy most, but whatever it is, set aside time — even five minutes a day — to do it.

Also, as cliché as it may sound, take time to laugh. Beyond being fun and feeling good, laughter offers short- and long-term health benefits. It stimulates your heart, lungs and muscles, and triggers endorphins that help improve your mood and even temporarily relieve pain. Laughing also releases and relieves muscle tension, so it can help you relax. And it boosts your immune system by releasing chemicals in your body that help fight stress.

Beyond all those awesome benefits, laughter helps strengthen relationships by creating bonds and shared experiences. And, when used appropriately in certain situations, humor can help defuse conflict.

