

How to Prevent Suicide

According to the World Health Organization, around 800,000 people end their lives every year. In Quebec, there are three suicides per day and of this number, 80% are men. With 34% of suicides, the 35-49 age group is the most affected (Quebec Association for Suicide Prevention). It is possible that at some point, one will encounter someone, close or distant, who is in distress and contemplating suicide. When faced with this, it is normal to feel powerless and at a loss for what to say or do. However, the best way to provide help and prevent suicide is accessible to everyone, since it's all about communication.

What Makes Someone Contemplate Suicide

Suicide can be explained by a complex interaction of different factors in a person's life at a particular time, and therefore, cannot be attributed to only one cause. Thus, contrary to what we may think, it is not only those who have serious mental illness who commit suicide. Factors such as depression, physical illness, trauma, addiction, grief, significant life changes, and financial problems can create a state of instability and lead to a state of crisis.

Those who are in suicidal crisis experience great psychological pain, symptoms related to depression (sadness, loss of enjoyment, insomnia, fatigue, feelings of worthlessness), a lot of powerlessness, isolation, and a sense of being at an impasse in their life. It is as if suicide becomes the only solution to ending intolerable suffering. On the other hand, it is essential to remember that **suicide is not a solution or a choice** because it is a final gesture that cannot be reversed.

Warning Signs

Here are some signs or behaviours that can indicate that a person may be thinking about suicide and at risk of taking action:

- Direct or indirect verbalization: "I no longer want to live", "I'd be better off dead", "People would be better off without me", "In any case, I'll be gone".
- Change in mood, sadness
- Loss of interest, loss of pleasure from activities that were previously enjoyed
- Anxiety
- Increase in alcohol/drug use
- Aggressive behaviour
- Impulsiveness, risk-taking
- Despair, feelings of worthlessness: « I am useless», « They'll be better off without me»
- Insomnia
- Loss of appetite
- Isolation
- Lack of hygiene
- Making a will, giving things away
- Meeting with family and friends as if to say goodbye
- Past suicide attempts, etc.

A person can present one or more of these signs as well as other signs that are not listed here.

What To Say

As soon as you feel worried about someone, you have doubts, or you suspect that someone is thinking about suicide, it is important to approach them and talk to them. In fact, you should question them directly about their thoughts. Do not avoid the word suicide: "Are you thinking about suicide?", "Are you considering taking your life?". An open and non-judgmental approach to what they are going through will help them feel reassured and inclined to open up.

Don't worry...it is not true that talking about suicide can give someone the idea to do it. If the person verbalizes suicidal thoughts, you can express your worry and that you would like to help. You can also inform them that suicidal thoughts result from pain and that there are ways to deal with this pain; that help is available. You can determine together who can help (family member, doctor, social worker, etc.) and provide them with coordinates for a resource that is available at all times, such as the Employee Assistance Program or a suicide prevention centre.

When To Be Alarmed And What To Do

The suicide process can be summarized in a few stages: 1 – Suicidal ideation (suicidal thoughts): The person thinks about suicide. It appears to be one possible way to deal with the crises and to eliminate pain. 2 – Intention: The person seriously contemplates suicide, thinking about it more and more often and for longer periods of time. 3 – A Plan: The person devises their plan (where, when, how, with what). It is at this stage that you need to be alarmed. When the person has decided

on a time when they will take action, and that it will be in the next 48 hours, this is urgent and **you must act**. Ironically, at this stage, it is possible that the person may seem to be doing better because they can envision the end of their suffering. The only way to know what a suicidal person is thinking or planning is to ask them, using direct questions: "How will you kill yourself?", "When will you do this?"

If you think that the person is at risk of taking action in the coming days, it is extremely important not to leave them alone and to take the necessary steps to ensure their safety. If you are not able to do this, you must find a person or a healthcare professional who will take charge of the situation. Ideally, you should not be on your own in trying to help someone who is in suicidal crisis. You can explore with them whether it is possible to contact a close relative or friend who is willing to take charge during the crisis.

Also, contact a resource that is accessible at all times (**your EAP, the Quebec Suicide Prevention Centre at 1-866-APPELLE**) to get help in managing the situation. If necessary, you can call emergency services for help (police, ambulance, hospital).

Conclusion

Know that, fortunately, the suicide process is dynamic and that at any point we can help a person who is suicidal to see solutions other than death. If you know someone who is contemplating suicide, or if you yourself are thinking about it, you are not alone! Contact your Employee Assistance Program. We are there to help you.

*Your EAP Team
Les Consultants Longpré & Associés*

1 800 567-2433

