

What To Do If You Think a Person is Having Suicidal Thoughts

You cannot predict death by suicide, but you can identify people who are at increased risk for suicidal behavior; take precautions and refer them for effective treatment.

- **Ask** the person directly if he or she (1) is having suicidal thoughts/ideas. (2) has a plan to do so and (3) has access to lethal means:
 - “Are you thinking about killing yourself?”
 - “Have you ever tried to hurt yourself before?”
 - “Do you think you might try to hurt yourself?”
 - “Have you thought of ways that you might hurt yourself?”
 - “Do you have pills/weapons in the house?”
 - This won’t increase the person’s suicidal thoughts. It will give you information that indicates how strongly the person has thought about killing him or herself.
 - Take seriously all suicide threats and all suicide attempts. A past history of suicide attempts is one of the strongest risk factors for death by suicide.
 - There is no evidence that “no-suicide contracts” prevent suicide. In fact, they may give counselors a false sense of reassurance.
- **Listen and Look** for the red flags for suicidal behavior, indicated by the mnemonic:

IS PATH WARM?

Ideation—Threatened or communicated
Substance Abuse—Excessive or increased

Purposeless—No reason for living
Anxiety—Agitation/Insomnia
Trapped—Feeling there is no way out
Hopeless

Withdrawing—From friends, family, society
Anger (uncontrolled)—Rage, seeking revenge
Recklessness—Risky acts, unthinking
Mood changes (dramatic)

- **Act** on what you learn.
 - If you think the person might harm him or herself, do not leave the person alone.
 - Say, “I’m going to get you some help.”
 - Call the Ashtabula County Mental Health and Recovery Services Board Hopeline at 1-800-577-7849 or the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, 1-800-273-TALK (8255). You will be connected to the nearest available crisis center. Or...
 - Take the person to the nearest hospital emergency department where a crisis intervention specialist can evaluate the individual.