

Responding to the Suicidal Student

Facts about suicide

Although suicide is a rare event, it is the second leading cause of death among college students.

Suicidal states are often associated with major depression, a combination of acute anxiety and depression, post traumatic stress disorder, and bipolar disorder.

People who are suicidal often tell people about their thoughts or give clues to others about their feelings.

Some factors associated with suicide risk are:

- Suicidal thoughts
- Pessimistic view of the future
- Intense feelings of hopelessness, especially when combined with anxiety/feelings of alienation and isolation
- Viewing death as a means of escape from distress
- Previous suicide attempts
- Personal or family history of depression or suicide

A student who is suicidal and who confides in someone is often ambivalent about suicide and open to discussion.

Students who are at high risk usually have a specific plan, have a means that is lethal (e.g., medication, knife, gun) and tend to be or feel isolated.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Call 521-6235 if the student is in immediate danger to him/herself.

Talk to the student in private.

Remain calm and take the lead.

Take a student's disclosure as a serious plea for help.

Ask the student directly about feelings and plans.

Express care and concern. Assure the student that you will help him or her reach a helping professional.

If the incident occurs during business hours, escort the Counseling Center located in the UC Building.

Call 521-6235 to access emergency services on weekends or after hours.

If you feel overwhelmed or unprepared to help a suicidal student, call the Student Affairs office (521-6175), which will maintain confidentiality and arrange a meeting with that student.

AVOID

Minimizing the situation. All threats must be considered potentially lethal.

Arguing with the student about the merits of living.

Allowing friends to assume responsibility for the student without getting input from a professional.

Assuming the family knows that the student has suicidal thoughts

Discussing the student's personal family history of suicidal attempts.