

Signs to Look For Ways to Help

The American Association of Suicidology offers tips on how people can help others who are threatening to hurt or kill themselves; looking for ways to kill themselves, such as seeking access to pills or weapons; or talking or writing about dying or suicide.

Some of the signs to look for include hopelessness, rage, anger, acting reckless or engaging in high-risk activities, feeling trapped, increased use of drugs or alcohol, withdrawing from family and friends, anxiety or agitation, difficulty sleeping or wanting to sleep all the time, dramatic mood swings and no sense of purpose in life.

The QPR Institute, which provides training related to suicide prevention, says a crucial first step to helping someone is asking how they are feeling and whether they have suicidal thoughts. Here are some suggestions the institute provides to help initiate that conversation:

- Have you been unhappy lately?
- Have you been so unhappy you wish you were dead?
- Do you ever wish you could go to sleep and never wake up?
- You know, when people are as upset as you seem to be, they sometimes wish they were dead. I'm wondering if you're feeling that way, too.
- Have you ever wanted to stop living?
- Are you thinking about suicide?

"Persuading someone not to end his or her life and to get help begins with the simple act of listening," the QPR Institute states in its training materials. "Listening is the greatest gift one human can give to another. Advice tends to be easy, quick, cheap and wrong. Listening takes time, patience and courage, but it is always right."

Once the person considering suicide has had an opportunity to share his or her feelings without interruption, the QPR Institute recommends offering to help make an appointment with a counselor, minister, psychologist or other professional the person feels comfortable talking to.

The institute suggests asking the person to promise to go on living and recommit to life. "Simply say to them, 'I want you to live. Won't you please stay alive until we can get you some help?' A promise not to hurt or kill oneself and to go on living until help is gotten is most frequently met with relief and an agreement to stay alive," the institute states.

Other tips for an effective intervention include: getting other family members, friends and colleagues involved in the person's safety network; removing the means of suicide; creating a crisis plan; and continuing the conversation so the person considering suicide will see hope and a reason to live.

—Melody Finnemore