

Understanding suicide risk and the power of prevention

When it comes to suicide prevention, knowledge is a powerful tool. Understanding what increases risk, what helps protect individuals, and how to recognize warning signs can make a meaningful difference in someone's life.

Risk factors: What increases vulnerability?

Risk factors don't cause suicide on their own, but they can increase a person's vulnerability, especially when multiple risk factors are present. These may include:

- **Mental health conditions:** Diagnoses like depression, bipolar disorder, anxiety, and substance use challenges can elevate risk.
- **Life stressors:** Stressful life events such as the loss or death of friends or family, rejection, financial hardship, or legal problems can feel overwhelming.
- **Personal or family history:** A previous suicide attempt, or a family history of suicide or mental illness, may heighten risk.
- **Barriers to care:** Difficulty accessing mental healthcare, stigma, or lack of culturally responsive support may prevent people from getting the help they need.
- **Exposure to suicide:** Knowing someone who died by suicide, particularly a close contact or recent loss, can heighten an person's risk.

Protective factors: What builds resilience?

While risk factors highlight vulnerabilities, protective factors offer hope. The following are strengths and supports that help reduce the likelihood of suicide:

- **Strong social connections:** Supportive relationships with family, friends, or a sense of belonging within a community can offer emotional strength and stability.
- **Access to mental healthcare:** Timely, affordable, and appropriate treatment can be life-changing. That's why telehealth companies are playing a vital role in breaking down traditional barriers to mental healthcare by expanding access through virtual appointments, partnering with insurers, and reaching people in underserved or remote areas.
- **Problem-solving and coping skills:** The ability to manage stress, regulate emotions, and find constructive solutions builds long-term resilience.
- **Cultural or religious beliefs:** A sense of purpose or moral objections to suicide can discourage suicidal actions for someone that might otherwise be at risk.
- **Safe environments:** Reducing access to lethal means (like firearms or medications) during periods of crisis is an evidence-based strategy for saving lives.

Warning signs: What to watch for

Recognizing signs that someone may be struggling is key to early intervention. These can be grouped into what someone says, how they act, and changes in mood.

What they might say:

- Expressing feelings of hopelessness or being a burden
- Talking about feeling trapped, in unbearable pain, or wanting to die

Behaviors you might notice:

- Withdrawing from friends, family, or activities
- Giving away personal belongings, or saying goodbye
- Noticeable changes in sleep, appetite, or energy
- Increased use of substances or engaging in risky behaviors.

Changes in mood:

- Persistent sadness, anxiety, or irritability
- Sudden relief or calm after a period of distress
- Unexplained anger or rage
- Loss of interest
- Expressions of shame, humiliation, or emotional numbness



You can make a difference

If you're worried about someone and suspect they could be at risk for suicide, trust your instincts. Reach out, ask how they're doing, and listen without judgment. Let them know they're not alone, and help connect them to support.

Crisis services are available 24/7:

- 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline: Call or text 988
- Crisis Text Line: Text HOME to 741741
- Rula Crisis Support Line: (877) 371-5488

Information adapted from [AFSP](#)