

SUICIDE PREVENTION IN THE WORKPLACE

As a manager, you are well positioned to notice if your employees are struggling and to take the first steps in assisting them to get help. You spend a lot of time at work and have day-to-day contact with your employees. You get to know them over time, can observe changes in their behavior, and may see them at critical points in their life. In addition, workplaces often have a structure, such as an HR Department or Employee Assistance Program (EAP), to which you can refer employees to help them find a mental health professional.

You can also play an active role in suicide prevention by creating a work environment that fosters communication, a sense of belonging, and respect. Feeling connected to a community promotes emotional well-being and can decrease risk for suicide. Stigma about mental illness can keep people from sharing their situation and seeking help, especially in their workplaces. Reassure your employees that mental health problems are real and treatable.

IDENTIFYING WHO MAY BE AT RISK FOR SUICIDE

Be alert to problems that increase suicide risk.

There are a large number of risk factors for suicide. Some of the most significant ones are:

- Prior suicide attempt(s)
- Alcohol and drug abuse
- Mood and anxiety disorders, e.g., depression or posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- Access to lethal means

Look for signs of immediate risk for suicide.

There are some behaviors that may mean a person is at immediate risk for suicide. These three should prompt you to take action right away:

- Talking about wanting to die or to kill oneself
- Looking for a way to kill oneself, such as searching online or obtaining a gun
- Talking about feeling hopeless or having no reason to live

Suicide risk is usually greater among people with more than one risk factor. For individuals who are already at risk, a “triggering” event causing shame or despair may make them more likely to attempt suicide. These events may include relationship problems or breakups, problems at work, financial hardships, legal difficulties, and worsening health. Even though most people with risk factors will not attempt suicide, they should be evaluated by a professional.

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RESPOND TO WHO MAY BE AT RISK FOR SUICIDE

Be prepared by knowing who to contact in your workplace if an employee is in distress or suicidal. The EAP and HR Department are the appropriate first points of contact.

Take action if you encounter someone who is at immediate risk.

If an employee is:

- Talking about wanting to die or to kill oneself
- Looking for a way to kill oneself, such as searching online or obtaining a gun
- Talking about feeling hopeless or having no reason to live

Take the following steps right away:

1. If the danger for self-harm seems imminent, call 911.
2. Stay with the person (or make sure the person is in a private, secure place with another caring person) until you can get further help.
3. Contact the EAP or HR Department and they will help you decide what to do. Provide any background information that may be helpful.
4. Maintain contact with the employee and the EAP or HR Department to provide appropriate support and follow-up.

Reach out to someone who may be at risk.

The steps just covered are an appropriate response to an employee showing *immediate* warning signs of suicide. To help other employees who may be at risk for suicide, you can take the steps below, depending on what feels most comfortable to you:

- Talk with your EAP or HR Department
- Reach out to the person:
 - Ask how he or she is doing.
 - Listen without judging.
 - Mention changes you have noticed in the person's behavior and say that you are concerned about his or her emotional well-being.
 - Suggest that he or she talk with someone in the EAP, the HR Department, or another mental health professional.
- Provide ongoing support to the person.

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- If warning signs are observed, contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at **1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255)** or visit the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org>
- For more information regarding the causes of suicide and prevention strategies, visit the American Association of Suicidology at <http://www.suicidology.org/resources/warning-signs>
- The CDC has released a technical package, “Preventing Suicide: A Technical Package of Policy, Programs, and Practices” that is available at <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/suicidetechnicalpackage.pdf>. A technical package is a collection of strategies that represents the best available evidence to prevent or reduce public health problems such as suicide.
- Additionally, guidance, support and resources are available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year by calling SupportLinc at **1-888-881-LINC (5462)** or visiting the web portal at www.supportlinc.com which provides additional resources for a variety of concerns.

Source: <http://www.workplacementalhealth.org> and the Suicide Prevention Resource Center