

Suicide in the Military

Suicide is a reaction to intense feelings of loneliness, worthlessness, hopelessness, or depression. Threats or attempts of suicide are calls for help. Knowing the warning signs and being prepared to answer these calls for help could prevent many suicides.

▼ Why people suicide.

Problems that seem overwhelming may lead a person to think the only solution is to end his or her life. Suicide also can take place indirectly when a person's reaction to a problem leads him or her to act recklessly or ignore serious illness.

▼ Risk factors.

The following are some stressful situations that can trigger suicidal feelings:

- Depression – Depression is the leading cause of suicide. It can be caused by a personal loss, heredity, or a chemical imbalance in the body.
- Crisis – Major life changes, anger, humiliation, or frustration can lead a person to attempt suicide, sometimes before having had a chance to think it over.
- Old age – The changes wrought by old age can be frightening and may lead an older person to think of suicide an alternative.
- Substance abuse – Substance abuse can weaken a person's self-control and lead to selfdestructive behavior.

▼ Warning signs.

Suicide is rarely a spur-of-the-moment decision and most people give warning signs that they are contemplating taking their own lives. Some warning signs are:

- Thinking about hurting or killing yourself. Looking for ways to kill yourself.
- Threats or previous attempts – People who threaten suicide must be taken seriously, even if they have no intention of carrying out the threat. A previous attempt may have generated the attention a person was needing - and needing that attention again, the person may attempt suicide again.
- Depression – Anyone suffering from severe and prolonged depression is at risk of attempting suicide.
- Personality or behavioral changes – Someone who has been depressed or troubled and suddenly is better or seems to have resolved their conflicts may have decided upon suicide as a solution. Insomnia, loss of weight or appetite, rage or anger, loss of sexual drive, withdrawing from families and friends, and self-destructive behavior like alcohol or drug abuse are also warning signs.
- Preparations for death – Someone suddenly making out a will, putting their affairs in order, giving away personal possessions, or acquiring the means of committing suicide (buying a gun, stockpiling sleeping pills, etc.), is sending out a warning sign.

▼ How you can help.

One of the misconceptions of suicide is that someone who has decided to take his or her life is beyond help. In most cases, the crisis period when a person is actually considering taking his or her life is limited. The person can be helped past this period.

Another misconception is that mentioning suicide may give the person the idea. If someone is showing warning signs of being suicidal, that person has already thought about it. Talking frankly about it can actually help prevent a person from acting on the idea.

If you or someone you know is thinking about suicide:

- You can call the toll-free Access Crisis Intervention (ACI) Hotline for your county. Visit the ACI hotline page for the number in your county:
<https://dmh.mo.gov/mental-illness/program-services/behavioral-health-crisis-hotline>
- Call the toll-free Veterans Crisis Line 1-800-273-TALK (8255) and press 1
- Go to the nearest hospital emergency room
- Or call 911 for emergency services

For your convenience in finding behavioral health resources, the Missouri Department of Mental Health (DMH), in partnership with the Missouri Behavioral Health Alliance (MOBHA), has compiled this list. These links will take you out of the DMH website. DMH and MOBHA do not endorse or take responsibility for the content of other organizations' websites.

The Veteran Crisis Line explains the signs of a crisis, offers a confidential self-check quiz, telephone, online and text help lines.

<http://www.veteranscrisisline.net/>



For more information,
contact the nearest
community mental health
center or the
Missouri Department of
Mental Health, Division of
Behavioral Health
P.O. Box 687
1706 East Elm Jefferson City,
MO 65101 573-751-8017
dmh.mo.gov

