

Perhaps you will never have to speak to someone who is contemplating suicide but it is possible that you will. Here are some things you should consider if you have reason to think someone believes that life is no longer worth living.



Often those who are considering suicide believe that no one is concerned about them. What can you do to ensure that others know that you are concerned about them and that you are the kind of person who can be turned to in times of distress?



What are the signs of a person who is in distress which you could look out for in others?

Don't Be Afraid To Talk About It

Some, should they become suspicious that another person is depressed or struggling with life, will carefully steer the conversation well away from any hint of the matter of self-harm. Sometimes they do so out of fear of finding out about something they could not cope with. Often they do it out of genuine concern lest they should "put the idea into his head." At best, you miss an opportunity to help, if you do that. You will miss an opportunity to relieve the burden of fears and worries that have been carefully concealed because of the shame provoking thought that "Christians should never think about suicide." At worst you will be leaving someone to continue down the path to self inflicted death.

If you become at all concerned that someone may be at risk of making a suicide attempt, then do not be afraid to inquire further regarding your concerns. If you approach your inquiry in the right way you

will not be suggesting ideas not already there, you will not do harm, and you will put yourself in a position to do much good.

Begin to broach the subject by asking about the future. If someone talks about firm plans for the future with a degree of hope and optimism, then further inquiry is unlikely to be fruitful or necessary. If the answers to these questions, on the other hand, heighten your concerns, then become a little more specific. Ask about the things that give life purpose.

If purpose is lacking, then it is time to ask more specifically, “Is life worth living?” and, if by this stage negative answers are still coming, you may, and should, freely inquire about thoughts of suicide. What plans have been made? How serious have the thoughts been? Have the plans been carefully thought through? Are they feasible? Have all the possible consequences been considered?

Often you will find, when you ask these questions, that the person who has been thinking in this way will be relieved to share his burden.

Try To Assess The Risk

By following the line of questioning I have outlined you will already be forming an opinion in your mind as to how much danger this person is in. There are some other factors which, if present, should heighten your concern, and it is good that you should be aware of them and inquire about them.

- A previous suicide attempt, especially if recent.
- A family history of suicide.
- Alcohol and drug abuse.
- Being older, single or unemployed.
- Having a psychiatric illness.
- Having a chronic or terminal physical illness.
- A recent separation or bereavement.
- Social isolation.
- Inadequate family or social support.
- Lack of a personal philosophy or beliefs.
- Easy access to the means of suicide — if you are seriously concerned about someone you should inquire, for example, about the presence of firearms in the home, or stocks of tablets in the medicine cupboard.
- Severe insomnia.
- Agitation or restlessness.

Never Take Risks

I have listed these factors for you only to raise your awareness of the things which should cause you to be concerned for someone’s safety. The thing which now needs to be emphasised is this: if you are at all concerned *never take risks*. Do all that is necessary to ensure that the person you are concerned about is as safe as possible. That might mean speaking to a relative or arranging an urgent consultation with a doctor. In particular remember—

- The belief that “those who talk about it never do it” is a fallacy.
- Someone who is at risk may say that he has no intention of suicide at the point when you are talking to him, but may later act on impulse, perhaps under an overwhelming wave of depression.
- Circumstances may change and deteriorate. A bad situation may rapidly become worse and someone who is just managing to keep going may readily be pushed to breaking point.
- Talking alone may not be enough. Supervision by relatives, or in hospital, may be needed and the decision regarding the degree of supervision required is best made by someone experienced in making such judgements.



What steps should you take if you are concerned that someone might be at risk of suicide?

Always Give Priority To Hope

It is a good rule in all our dealings with others to always give priority to hope. Hopelessness is the single most important factor with regard to the risk of suicide, because hope is what keeps us going when everything goes wrong.

Often when we use the word “hope” we are expressing a wishful or optimistic outlook as, for example, when we say, “I hope the sun will shine tomorrow.” However, when I talk about giving priority to hope I am talking about something much more solid. I am talking about hope as the Bible defines it: hope which is firm and assured: hope so solid that a life can be built upon it: hope that reflects confident assurance. Such hope can only be built upon the written promises of God.

As Christians we should be people of hope. We have so much to look forward to. Our lives should reflect the hope we have, and if at any time we sense that our brothers or sisters in the Lord are losing sight of the promised inheritance which is theirs we should do all in our power to re-establish hope in them. In helping those who are struggling with life nothing is more urgent or important.



How would you counsel someone who has lost hope?

A Challenge For You

Let me leave you with some questions to consider. If they give you difficulty then you will probably not be able to impart hope to others; so give them some deep thought and try to be as honest with yourself as possible.

- What is the hope upon which your life is built?
- Can you support that hope with clear promises from God's Word?
- What passages of Scripture do you refer to in doing so?
- Do you pass hope on to others?
- How do you encourage hope in your fellow believers?