

## Tips for Talking with Youth, Adults, Friends, Family or Co-workers in Crisis

L.E.A.R.N.© intervention steps. Forefront: Innovations in Suicide Prevention ([www.intheforefront.org](http://www.intheforefront.org)), University of Washington

**Don't assume** a person is not at risk for suicide. Anyone can be....but you can help. *Suicide IS preventable.*

1. **Look for Warning signs / ways the person is "inviting help"**: Examples: they are in pain, desperate, hopeless (*"it will never get better"*), helpless (*"there is nothing I can do"*); feeling trapped (*"there is no way out"*), like a burden, or that they try to fit in – but it never works. **Look for changes** such as isolating behavior, giving away possessions, losing interest in activities, using more alcohol or drugs, acting impulsively. Listen for threats such as: *"I won't be needing these anymore"*, *"You'll miss me if I'm dead"*, *"Everyone will be better off without me."*
2. **Empathize with them**: If you think someone may be at risk for suicide, **talk to them about what is going on**. You don't have to be a therapist. **Make a connection. Listen... really listen**. Give full attention. Don't interrupt, minimize their situation or try to convince them everything will get better. Control your fears so you can focus on the other person. Examples of things you could say to start the conversation:
  - a. *"How are things going?" "You seem upset; do you want to talk about it?"*
  - b. *"I care about you. You are going through a lot. Let's talk."*
  - c. *"It sounds like you have so many problems and they feel impossible to deal with."*
  - d. *"You are in a lot of pain. I see it and I hear that you feel alone in this pain. I care. Please tell me more."*

Continue to **listen**, build rapport and trust. **Help them to feel understood. That is so key**. Say: *"That sounds like a very difficult situation."* *"I would be upset about that too."* Please understand, for some, suicide can feel like a logical way to escape pain. Don't judge, or tell them they have so much to live for or promise it will get better.

3. **ASK the person clearly, directly and compassionately about suicide**. "Are you thinking about suicide?" or "Are you thinking about ending your life?" or "When you say \_\_\_ do you mean you're thinking about killing yourself?"
  - a. **Asking the suicide question does not increase risk**. You won't cause someone to act on it by asking.
  - b. Asking sincerely, compassionately and in context to what you have seen shows that someone cares.
  - c. Sharing suicidal thoughts reduces feelings of isolation.
  - d. Talking generally provides comfort and provides some relief.
  - e. **If they say "yes" it is important to not panic**. Say: *"That took a lot of courage to tell me. Thank you."* Demonstrate calm. Ask if they have plans (when, where, how) and means (have a gun, rope, pills etc.).
4. **Remove the danger**: In the ASK step you inquired about a suicide plan. If they have means/access to guns, ropes or excess medication. Now work with friends, family or law enforcement to secure or remove these items.
5. **Next level of care**: Let them know you are concerned and that you would like to help them. Ask if you can **help connect them with someone who has more expertise**. Say: *"Can I give you the name of a counselor who might be able to help"* or *"I'm willing to go with you to our local help center [or school counselor etc.] or..."* *"Lets create a safety plan together about who you can call and what you can do if you feel at risk again in the future."*

Free, 24/7, anonymous help is available by calling the **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK (8255)**  
Here in King County.... That number automatically routes you the the Crisis Clinic

In King County, **TeenLink** is a resource line for teens, staffed by trained teens. See: [www.866teenlink.org](http://www.866teenlink.org) or call 1-866-833-6546  
**MY3 is a great, free app** (<http://www.my3app.org/>) available for iPhones or Android devices that helps create a safety plan.

**If someone is in immediate risk for suicide, call 911.... Or take them to the nearest hospital if it is safe for you to do so.**