

Suicide is preventable...

And, first responders play an important role in community-based suicide prevention strategies. Police, firefighters and EMS are often the first on the scene when a person is in mental health crisis or a suicide death has occurred. Knowing about suicide warning signs, how to properly intervene, and how to effectively and safely support suicide loss survivors can save a life.

What is Different About Suicide Loss?

The loss of a loved one to suicide is usually unexpected and shocking. The grief and bereavement that follows the death is very much an individual process with no marked duration. The emotions of those who experience a suicide loss can be similar to those who experience other sudden deaths, but often have additional emotions making for profound differences that should be noted :

<u>Sudden Death</u>	<u>Suicide Death</u>
Shock	Guilt
Disbelief	Blame
Devastation	Shame
Denial	Embarrassment
Numbness	Social stigma

Responding to Suicide Threats and Suicide Attempts

It is important that all suicide threats and attempts are taken seriously. When arriving at the scene where someone may be at risk for suicide or may have attempted suicide, follow these recommendations:

1. **Ensure the safety of everybody present.**
Remove any lethal means from the scene.
2. **Address any serious medical needs first**, for example, if the patient is unconscious or having difficulty breathing

3. **Establish rapport with the patient.** Talk in a calm, accepting, and supportive manner. Explain everything that is happening and how you can help.
4. **Assess the patient:**
 - If an attempt was made, determine medical need and intervene appropriately.
 - Whether an attempt has been made or not, encourage the patient to talk about how they are feeling, acknowledge the feelings, and do not judge them.
 - If there has not been an attempt, ask direct questions about their intentions to determine risk. For example:
“Are you thinking about killing yourself?”
“Do you have a plan for suicide?”
5. **Supervise the patient constantly.**
If necessary, set up protective measures so the person cannot engage in any suicidal behaviors.
6. **Collect items** such as toxic substances, alcohol, drugs, medications that may have been taken. Make sure those items go to the hospital with the patient so proper care can be administered.
7. **Transport the patient** to the most appropriate facility (Emergency department, crisis center, etc.)



Supporting Suicide Loss Survivors

The immediate needs of suicide loss survivors can vary. Here are some ways in which support can be offered to survivors of suicide loss:

1. **Establish rapport** and explain that you are there to help. Be sensitive to their feelings and allow them to express their emotions freely without judgment.
2. **Briefly explain the investigation process** when an unnatural death occurs, including what will happen to the body of their loved one.
3. **Help survivors identify supports** such as other family members, friends, or clergy. Offer to contact these supports for the survivor directly.
4. **Provide written information** about community resources they can contact for support, such as mental health providers and suicide survivor groups.
5. **Be mindful about location of family members at the scene.** Close family and friends will remember the details of this day, likely, for the rest of their lives. Consider what they may overhear. Be mindful if needing to separate family members.

“At that moment you really feel like you are the first person who has ever gone through something like that.”

-Loss Survivor

Warning Signs

There are behaviors that may indicate a person is at high risk for suicide. Take immediate action to protect someone if they exhibit any one of the following warning signs:

- Threatening to or talking about hurting or killing him/her self
- Looking for suicide methods
- Talking about feeling hopeless or having no reason to live

Other behaviors may also indicate a serious risk; especially if the behavior is new, has increased, and/or seems related to a painful event, loss or change. Be aware if the person has exhibited any of the following warning signs:

- Withdrawal or isolation
- Feeling like a burden to others
- Talking about being in unbearable pain
- Chronic, non-specific stomach issues
- Dramatic mood swings
- Agitation, aggression, anger
- Insomnia, sleep disturbance or nightmares
- Increased drug and/alcohol use



**If you or someone you know
is in crisis or emotional
distress please call
1-800-273-TALK (2733) or
1-208-398-HELP (4357)**

Crisis Centers

Idaho's Behavioral Health Community Crisis Centers provide services to adults 18 and older in need of mental health and/or substance use disorder crisis services. Centers are open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Pathways Community Crisis Center of Southwest Idaho
7192 Potomac Drive, **Boise, Idaho 83704**
1-833-5-CRISIS (274747)

Western Idaho Community Crisis Center
524 Cleveland Blvd., Suite 160, **Caldwell, ID 83605**
208-402-1044

North Idaho Crisis Center
2195 Ironwood Court, Suite D, **Coeur D' Alene, Idaho 83814**
208-625-4884

Behavioral Health Crisis Center of East Idaho
1650 N. Holmes Avenue, **Idaho Falls, Idaho 83401**
208-522-0727

Southeast Idaho Behavioral Health Crisis Center
1001 N 7th Ave N. Ste 160, **Pocatello, Bannock County 83201**
208-909-5177

Crisis Center of South Central Idaho
570 Shoup Avenue West, **Twin Falls, Idaho 83301**
866-737-1128

Suicide Prevention Program
Idaho Department of Health & Welfare
Division of Public Health
450 West State Street, 4th Floor
PO Box 83720
Boise, Idaho 83720-0036
Phone: 208-334-4953
spp.dhw.idaho.gov

**For more suicide prevention materials
including safety plans and care cards
visit: healthtools.dhw.idaho.gov**



Suicide Prevention for First Responders:



Helping the Community

