

How to help a friend: Suicide prevention

September 30 2013, by Mifa Kim

My name is Mifa Kim. I'm a senior studying psychology and a peer educator at Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS). I am spreading the word about the How to Help a Friend campaign, an online resource with information and advice on how CU community members can help friends or other people in their lives who may be encountering various challenges.

September is Suicide Prevention Month. Suicide can be an extremely hard and sensitive topic to talk about. It can be difficult to know when and how to approach a friend or loved one who is contemplating suicide and there can often be a stigma associated with it. It can be seen as a private matter that should not be discussed amongst friends. Suicide is the second leading cause of death for college students. Since college is a time of adjustment, an environment where people may feel lonely, confused, detached or stressed, students can be especially vulnerable. This is why it is important to reach out if you think a friend could be contemplating suicide.

Common Myth About Suicide: "Asking a person or inquiring about suicidal thoughts will only make them consider suicide as an option or make them angry and increase the risk of suicide."

Reality: Asking someone directly about suicidal intent lowers anxiety, opens up communication, and lowers the risk of an impulsive act. It lets them know that there is support, understanding, and that they are not alone in this situation.

This article focuses on how friends can play a vital role in helping friends and loved ones with issues of suicide. The first step is to simply ask your friend if they are contemplating suicide. Simply approaching the topic can save a life.

Step 1: QUESTION

The most beneficial thing you can do is to ask your friend if they are thinking about suicide. This makes it clear as to what is going on and will be a relief for both you and your friend. It can be intimidating, but it can save a life! Here are some basic tips:

- If in doubt, don't wait—ask the question
- If the person is reluctant, be persistent.
- Talk to the person alone in a private setting without distractions.
- Allow the person to talk freely and allow plenty of time.
- Have resources handy: Check out our resource page.
- If you can't ask the question, find someone who can for you.
- You can ask directly: "Are you thinking about killing yourself?"
- You can ask in-directly: "Have you been unhappy lately? Have you been so unhappy that you are thinking about ending your life?"
- Ways NOT to ask: "You're not suicidal, are you?" This doesn't allow a safe space for them to openly admit how they are feeling.

Step 2: PERSUADE

If your friend says that they have been thinking about or planning suicide, the next step is to persuade them to get help. For example you could ask, "Will you go with me to get help?" or "Will you let me help you get help?" Offering hope of any form can be extremely powerful. Also, listen to them without judgment.

Step 3: REFER

Any willingness to get help at some time, even in the future, is a good outcome. The following is the best three ways to refer someone:

- Taking the person directly to someone who can help. (A counselor, therapist, a pastor, a parent, etc are examples)
- Getting a commitment from them to accept help, and making arrangements to get that help.
- Give them information about resources and get a commitment they will not to complete or attempt suicide.

Remember: If your friend resists getting help and you are worried about his/her safety or unsure of what to do, call someone for support. Try calling CAPS or PHP for 24/7 support: CAPS: 303-492-6766, PHP: 303-492-5654.

In the case of an emergency call 911, especially if you think their life is in immediate danger from [suicide](#).

Resource:

How to Help a Friend—Want more information on adjustment or more topics? Worried about someone? This is a peer-to-peer resource to help students help each other.

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)—A free counseling resource for CU Boulder students. CAPS offer six free sessions per academic year and free workshops and groups. They have walk-in hours from M-F, 10 a.m.-4 p.m. They are located at the Center for Community (C4C) at S440 and can be reached at 303-492-6766.

National Hopeline Network

1-800-SUICIDE (1-800-784-2433)

Suicide Prevention Lifeline

1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255)

Provided by University of Colorado at Boulder

Citation: How to help a friend: Suicide prevention (2013, September 30) retrieved 30 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2013-09-friend-suicide.html>

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