

RECOGNIZING WARNING SIGNS IN COLLEGE STUDENTS

College students have their own culture and language. You may know your friends better than their own parents do. And you may be able to tell that something is wrong with one of your classmates when the professors and faculty can't. You can use your insights to help your friends and classmates find help when they are having problems.

While there is no foolproof method of determining that someone is thinking of hurting themselves, the following signs might indicate that someone is considering suicide:

- **A suddenly worsening school performance.** Good students who suddenly start ignoring assignments and cutting classes may have problems-including depression or drug and alcohol abuse-that can affect their health and happiness and put them at risk of suicide.
- **Unhealthy peer relationships.** Students who don't have friends, or suddenly reject their friends, may be at risk. A friend who suddenly rejects you, claiming, "You just don't understand me anymore," may be having emotional problems.
- **Indications that the student is in an abusive relationship.** Some young people may be physically or emotionally abused by a member of their family or significant other. Signs that a person may be in an abusive relationship include unexplained bruises or other injuries that they refuse to discuss.
- **Signs of an eating disorder.** An eating disorder is an obvious sign that someone needs help. A dramatic change in weight that is not the result of a medically supervised diet may also indicate that something is wrong.
- **Difficulty in adjusting to sexual/gender identity.** Gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered young people have higher suicide attempt rates than their heterosexual peers. These youth often face social pressures that make life challenging for them.
- **Depression.** Depression is an emotional problem that increases a person's risk of suicide. The following signs indicate that someone may be depressed:
 - A sudden worsening in school performance
 - Withdrawal from friends and extracurricular activities
 - Expressions of sadness and hopelessness, or anger and rage
 - A sudden, unexplained decline in enthusiasm and energy
 - Overreaction to criticism
 - Lowered self-esteem, or feelings of guilt
 - Indecision, lack of concentration, and forgetfulness
 - Restlessness and agitation
 - Changes in eating or sleeping patterns
 - Unprovoked episodes of crying
 - Sudden neglect of appearance and hygiene
 - Seeming to feel tired all the time, for no apparent reason
 - An increase in the use of alcohol or other drugs

If you witness these warning signs, talk with the person and encourage them to seek help as soon as possible. You can call Counseling Services at 413-662-5331 Monday through Friday, from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. After hours, call (800) 273-TALK (8255). This National Suicide Prevention hotline is available 24 hours per day, seven days per week, and is answered locally.

The following warning signs most directly indicate the individual needs immediate intervention. If someone exhibits any of these warning signs, call 5100 on campus or 911.

- Threatening to hurt or kill themselves, talking about harming themselves, or announcing that they've made a plan to kill themselves
- Obtaining a weapon or other items that they could use to hurt themselves (such as prescription medications)
- Talking or writing about death, dying, or suicide
- Giving away prized possessions
- Neglecting their appearance and hygiene

Watch for statements like:

- "Nobody cares."
- "Everyone will be better off without me."
- "I wish I were dead."
- "I'm going to end it all."
- "You will be better off without me."
- "What's the point of living?"
- "Soon you won't have to worry about me."
- "Who cares if I'm dead, anyway?"

The following statements indicate emotions and thoughts of someone who may be considering suicide:

- Can't stop the pain
- Can't think clearly
- Can't make decisions
- Can't see any way out
- Can't sleep, eat or work
- Can't get out of depression
- Can't make the sadness go away
- Can't see a future without pain
- Can't see themselves as worthwhile
- Can't get someone's attention