



L A K E F R O N T
W E L L N E S S C E N T E R, S . C .

161 West Wisconsin Avenue, Suite 2B Pewaukee, WI 53072
Phone 262-695-8857 www.lakefrontwellness.com

Abundant Living... Discover the Possibilities!

SUICIDAL THOUGHTS

This service will connect you with a crisis center in your area. 1-800-SUICIDE
American Association of Suicidology www.suicidology.org

Substance Abuse and Intimate Relationships

Nothing is as scary to parents, children, spouses, and loved ones as somebody they care about expressing suicidal thoughts, which is referred to as "suicidal ideation" by mental health professionals. We feel like we must jump into action and stop them from even thinking about such a terrible thing. We feel a gnawing in the pit of our stomach asking us the question, "Why?"

The idea of losing someone we love to death is an unpleasant thought. The idea that this person we care about would choose death over life is frightening. We feel both responsible for that person's well-being and terribly helpless to do anything about it.

Answering the Question "Why?"

Why would a person want to commit suicide when they have so much to live for? The answer is that many people are in such great pain or in such difficult circumstances that they feel that their lives aren't worth living. Suicidal thoughts may be brought on by a major life transition, such as the death of a loved one, loss of a job, or the end of a relationship—situations that may leave people feeling overwhelmed, desperate, hurt, and helpless.

Other people may be experiencing a steady decline in the quality of their lives, and may blame themselves and think that something is wrong with them. The more they blame themselves, the less worthy they feel of having success, having friends, or having fun. They perceive the future as being hopeless. Others feel so buried under so many little things that have gone wrong that they feel like they are drowning.

All of these people may be in such a world of pain and hurt that death ceases to be scary—it begins to look like an easy way out. They've lost their perspective on reality, and suicide seems to be a simple solution to end their despair.



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What are the Warning Signs?

There is no "typical suicidal person." However, there are several behaviors that can indicate that a person is seriously considering suicide. These include:

- talk about committing suicide and preoccupation with death and dying
- trouble eating or sleeping and noticeable change in personal appearance
- loss of interest in work, school, or hobbies and withdrawal from social activities, friends, and family
- drastic change in behavior, often taking unnecessary risks as if they didn't care what happened
- increased use of alcohol and drugs
- signs of preparing for death—making funeral arrangements or giving away prized possessions

Any combination of these actions might alert both family and friends that a person is struggling with life and considering suicide as an option.

What Can I Do?

One of the most important things that you can do if someone you care about talks about suicide is to remain calm and listen to that person. Remember, people who are feeling suicidal isolate themselves, so reaching out to them is vital. They need you to encourage them to talk and then they need you to listen carefully. Other important things to keep in mind include:

- Talk openly and directly about suicide. Use the words "suicide", "kill yourself", and "dead" in a matter-of-fact way.
- Be nonjudgmental and accept the person's feelings, even if you disagree with them. Don't get into a debate as to why they should stay alive, or whether suicide is right or wrong—your arguments won't help and the suicidal person might tune you out.
- Show your interest and support. Don't let the person swear you to secrecy. It's unfair of them to ask you to do so.

As a person tells you that he or she is thinking about suicide, start thinking about people you can ask for help. You can do a lot to help the person initially, but the situation is too dangerous to handle entirely on your own. Your best source of help will ultimately be a mental health professional, most likely a therapist, who has the knowledge and training to give the suicidal person the assistance they need.

What is Therapy Like?

Initially, the therapist will talk with the suicidal person and listen carefully as he or she tells their story. A test may be done to determine how suicidal the person is. The person may also be asked to sign a "no suicide contract", in which he or she promises not to commit suicide without first seeking help. If the therapist feels that the situation is too dangerous, the therapist may suggest short-term hospitalization to keep the suicidal person safe for the moment.



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The therapist will treat the suicidal person as a unique individual with unique problems. This can be accomplished in several ways—some therapists will see the individual alone, while others will see suicidal people in groups. Marriage and Family Therapists conduct therapy sessions with both the individual and his or her family. Because so many suicidal people isolate themselves, family therapy brings the family into the sessions to support the individual who is having problems. The family can also provide insight as to what pushed the person to consider suicide, and what might change in his or her life to make life better. Once the family understands the suicidal person's story and feelings, they can help him or her from sliding back into isolation. The family will be asked to agree to work with the suicidal person in order to change the atmosphere of the family into one of hope and mutual encouragement. In this way, the person with suicidal thoughts, the therapist, and the family act as a team to improve the family relationships and, in the end, the life of the formerly suicidal person.

Books

Conrey, D. L. (1991). *Out of the nightmare*. New York: New Liberty Press. This is the best single reference for the family and friends of suicidal people.

O'Conner, R. (1997). *Undoing depression*. Boston: Little, Brown & Co. This is a frank discussion of depression and gives a down to earth view of what it feels like to feel like dying.

Wroblewski, A. (1984). *Suicide: Why?* Minneapolis: Afterwoods. This is an excellent book in question-and-answer format that is filled with useful information.

Lester, D. (1989). *Questions and answers about suicide*. Philadelphia: The Charles Press. This is another question-and-answer book that answers frequently asked questions about suicide.

Burns, D. (1990). *Feeling good handbook*. New York: Plume Publishers. This is a manual which gives step-by-step advice to people who are depressed so that they can understand themselves better.

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*information prepared by professionals at the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapist
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