



SOS Digital - Providing Support to Students in Distress

Suicidal Tendencies

Self-Help Guide for Staff



Universidade do Minho



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SUICIDAL THOUGHTS AND BEHAVIOURS: HOW TO REACT AND PREVENT THEM

1. How do you recognize a person at risk of suicide?

- Lack of hope (e.g. hopelessness negative view of self, present and future)
- Depressive symptoms (e.g. sadness, feeling down, inability to feel pleasure, sense of worthlessness, excessive guilt)
- Social isolation (e.g. relational and social losses)
- Recurring thoughts of death and suicide ("*I feel like dying!*", "*I'd like to go to sleep and never wake up again*", "*Who cares if I die?*").
- The careless and scruffy look

You need to take these signs seriously and recommend a specialist. Several factors can intensify suicidal tendencies at some time.

2. Which people are particularly vulnerable? Risk factors

- Stressful life events that exceed people's ability to cope with them (legal, work, relationship, family problems)
- People who have recently experienced someone else's suicide (about 70% of relatives suffer from depressive conditions as a result)
- People living a very poor social and relational life (social isolation, relational and social losses)
- Particularly difficult life stories with traumas and abuse suffered
- Previous suicide attempts or self-inflicted injuries
- People who have a mental illness (major depression, borderline personality disorder, bipolar disorder)
- People, who live in a condition of risk and fragility
- People with history of suicide attempts

3. Myths and prejudice about people at risk of suicide.

<p>"People who talk about suicide don't do it."</p> <p>FALSE!</p>	<p>A lot of people who commit suicide announce it in advance. According to studies, even some of the people in a severe crisis try to seek professional help first. This gives other people the opportunity to help them.</p>

<p>"There are no signs that can prevent suicide" FALSE!</p>	<p>Many people who committed suicide showed specific signs many weeks before. It is essential to understand and pay attention to the warning signs.</p>
<p>"Talking about suicide can encourage it." FALSE!</p>	<p>It is important to talk openly about suicide, to share the distress and not feel alone.</p>
<p>"If you talk to someone about suicidal intent, you cause suicide." FALSE!</p>	<p>The possibility of talking to someone about one's suicidal thoughts is usually a relief.</p>
<p>"Suicidal thoughts are not normal." FALSE!</p>	<p>Thinking about life and death is normal.</p>

HOW TO HANDLE THE SITUATION?

1. How to approach the person?

- Approach the person if he or she appears to be in crisis and has a particularly depressed tone. (see **How do you recognize a person at risk of suicide?**)
- A simple and direct question can be a good start ("**How are you?**"). If a teacher notices a risk situation after the lesson, he can ask the student how the lesson went and if there are any problems.
- Listen and talk quietly to the person.
- Express your preoccupation, then describe the observations and feelings on which this preoccupation is based. ("**I get the impression that you are confused / that you are in some difficulties**")
- Take the time to create a situation where the person can start talking about how they feel.
- Do not underestimate the statements and do not judge, **suicide is not a choice.**
- Have an attitude of understanding and willingness to help. You can say, "**You're not alone. I'm at your side. You need help, and I'm here to help you.**"
- Discuss the next steps with the person in crisis. ("**Who can help you, who can we call?**")

2. What to do? How can you help?

There is no standard model or solution, because every situation is different. However, doing nothing or looking the other way is always the worst choice. If you feel that a person needs help, do not hesitate to approach or contact them. If you feel that you are unable to respond, ask another person to do so. Make sure that the person at risk contacts specialist services, family or friends directly or by phone.

If a suicide attempt has already been made, ask for help and call the emergency number.

3. What should not be done in these situations?

- **Don't leave a person in crisis alone.**
- Don't minimize by saying everything will be fine.
- Avoid subjective evaluations or simple advice.
- Do not avoid the term "suicide", because it is important to approach the subject in a direct but neutral way.
- Do not agree to keep the secret of suicide will if the person asks for it.
- If help is refused, do not take it personally and seek cooperation from other people.

Remember!

- ✓ Students experience difficult times during exams
- ✓ Stress can damage the mental health of students.
- ✓ Staff have an important role to play in detecting a risk situation
- ✓ Sometimes the student's situation is more serious than you think.
- ✓ If you see that a student is in difficulties, you need to take action
- ✓ Don't lose sight of them because any behavior can be important to understand the situation.
- ✓ Some words can make a difference
- ✓ It is important to create a climate where the students can talk about how they feel.

USEFUL CONTACTS

- ✓ If you are a staff from UMinho please click [here](#)
- ✓ If you are a staff from UniTrento please click [here](#)
- ✓ If you are a staff from USC please click [here](#)
- ✓ If you are a staff from AMU please click [here](#)

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