September is National Suicide Prevention Month

Reaching Out: What Each of Us Can Do

When we talk about the topic of suicide, it is very important to focus on hope. National Suicide Prevention Month offers us all an opportunity to learn more about thinking and acting differently about this often misunderstood cause of death. According to a recent report by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), suicide is the tenth leading cause of death in the US, and the second leading cause of death for youth aged 15 to 24.

“Being a caring friend, co-worker, family member and neighbor can go a long way by providing critical support and in preventing social isolation,” says Donna Hardaker, Workplace Mental Health and Peer Engagement Program Manager for Sutter Health. “Learning suicide intervention skills is also important to building safer communities. Social connection and having meaningful life-saving conversations become the antidote to suicide.”

RISK FACTORS

Anyone can be at risk for having thoughts of suicide. Often thoughts of suicide occur when someone is experiencing a stressful life event such as financial problems, loss of a loved one or a relationship, social isolation or loneliness, personal experience of suicide loss, or when using alcohol or drugs excessively. A person may have a mental health condition, but not always. We can focus on paying attention to each other and being ready to reach out. We can also be more aware of ourselves, and if we are having thoughts of suicide, remember that a listening ear is available for us as well.

KNOW THE SIGNS

Visit SuicidesPreventable.org to learn more about the skills and tools you can use to have an effective conversation with someone who is thinking of suicide. We can also learn to recognize common signs that may indicate that someone is thinking of suicide. Always regard any of these signs as serious:

- Withdrawing from family and friends
- Changes in sleep patterns
- No longer participating in favorite activities or hobbies
- Taking steps to tie up loose ends such as giving away possessions, settling debts, etc.
- Talking about wanting to die or preoccupation with death
- Sometimes there is even a surprising change in mood from depression to cheerfulness as if the solution is now clear
- Reckless behavior – acting in dangerous or detrimental ways not seeming to care about the consequences
- Uncontrolled anger
Learn How to Ask, Listen and What to Say

Talking to a friend or family member about suicide can feel uncomfortable when we don’t know what to say. Find step by step suggestions of what to say by visiting SuicideIsPreventable.org. If you think someone you know may be considering suicide, the best way to find out is to ask. Asking questions does not cause suicide. In fact, the opposite is true. Expressing your concern and telling the person that you are wondering if they are thinking about suicide may help them trust that you can handle talking about it, and this act of asking shows you care.

DO:
- Do take the person seriously – ask “Are you having thoughts of suicide?”
- Do listen – the fact that the person is talking is a very positive sign
- Do be calm, accepting and non-judgmental
- Do offer hope – reassure the person that the feelings, although overwhelming, are temporary and help is available
- Do let the person know that they are important to you and you will walk through this with them

DON’T:
- Don’t try to argue – avoid saying “You have so much to live for” or “You will hurt your family”
- Don’t act shocked or say that suicide is wrong
- Don’t promise confidentiality – tell the person that you may need to ask for help in order to keep them safe
- Don’t give advice or try figure out how to solve their problems – just focus on listening
- Don’t blame yourself – this is not about you right now, this is about providing effective support to the other person through this life-threatening time

THINGS TO SAY AND ASK:
- “I’ve been feeling concerned about you lately and wondered how you are doing.”
- “Have you thought about getting help?”
- “You are not alone in this. I’m here for you.”
- “I may not be able to understand exactly how you feel, but I care about you and want to help.”

Imagine… if we learned to break through our fears and discomfort, paving the way for meaningful and compassionate conversations with a person who is considering suicide, the number of lives that could be saved. Even the smallest acts of compassion can make an enormous difference.

DID YOU KNOW?

Sutter Health EAP is available for consultation. Planning to approach someone you care about and want to get some input ahead of time? Give EAP a call: 800-477-2258.

SUICIDE SUPPORT AND PREVENTION RESOURCES:
You don’t have to have all of the answers in order to talk to someone who is thinking about suicide. Listening to the person is the most important thing you can do. Being aware of resources and professional help is as important to support yourself as you seek to help another. You can offer to help them access available resources including:

- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK (8255) - If you or someone you know is in crisis or experiencing difficult or suicidal thoughts, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline can offer immediate support.
- Crisis Text Line: Text HOME to 741741 for free, 24/7 crisis support in the U.S.

For additional information, please visit:
- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention: afsp.org
- Know the Signs: SuicideIsPreventable.org

Sutter Health EAP provides employees and eligible dependents confidential referrals to licensed, professional therapists. Call 800-477-2258 or visit sutterhealth.org/EAP to learn more about this no cost benefit.