

Would you know what to do if a family member or friend threatened suicide?

We all know someone suffering from a mental illness or who is an overwhelmed caregiver or who struggling in this down economy. These are among many reasons fellow citizens turn to The Samaritans of Rhode Island every day as they deal with pressure and contemplate suicide. If the same struggling loved one or friend threatened suicide, would you know what to do? Suicide is considered a missed opportunity in prevention and it is imperative for everyone to learn more. The Samaritans of Rhode Island offers the following guidance:

(1) Understand the problem.

The brain is one of the body's major organs like the heart, lung, liver or kidney. Just as you would not tell someone to get over a heart attack, high blood pressure, diabetes or cancer, so should you not tell someone to get over depression. Treat signs of depression and threats of suicide as part of a serious illness.

Additionally, changes in medications or diet, stress, lifestyle issues or previously undiagnosed medical problems can impact on a person's physical and behavioral well being often causing chemical imbalances and impacting on a person's ability to cope.

Experts tell us three things about the truly suicidal - they are **without hope, believe no one cares of they live or die and in the end truly believe they are doing everyone a favor if they die by suicide.**

For suicidal individuals, life's circumstances are overwhelming; their coping skills are no longer adequate; and they believe no options exist except suicide.

At The Samaritans, we are often asked, "Would our loved one have done it if he or she knew how much pain they caused?" We are also asked, "Isn't suicide a selfish act?"

For the suicidal, thoughts of others - even the closest family members - have been chased away by depression and mental illness.

Is there time for you to do anything?

There is usually time to intervene. Suicide is not usually spontaneous. Planning the time, the method and the means may take hours, days, weeks or more.

(2) Ask "Are you suicidal?" It is a myth to believe if you ask the thought will be planted and the outcome inevitable. Tell your loved one, it's ok to talk to you, that you love and care about them and don't want them to die. Show you care by asking in a calm, concerned manner. Do not act shocked or afraid. Overreacting, speaking in a judgmental manner or closing the door with advice will push your loved one away. Take the time to listen, patiently. Ask your loved one what is bothering him or her the most. The answer may provide a clue to the problem and ways in which you can help.

(3) Determine if everyone is safe. Are there weapons? Are other persons, especially children, in the vicinity? In all life threatening situations, please call **RI Emergency 911** directly.

Are you contemplating reporting a suicidal person to the police and have concerns about your safety if you make such a report? Please call 911 or your local municipal police. Share your concerns about safety and ask for guidance.

(4) Urge your loved one to visit the nearest acute care hospital for an emergency medical and psychiatric assessment.

By RI law, the insured and uninsured must be treated at RI's acute care hospital emergency rooms. Not all patients will be admitted, but hospitals can provide guidance on follow-up care and treatment. For all children (infant -18), visit Hasbro Children's Hospital for an emergency assessment, medical clearance and referrals to local resources.

(5) Offer to go with your loved one as he or she seeks care.

Often times, a depressed person is so hopeless and despairing he or she is unable to seek help. Offer to go along. Encourage your family member or friend to give his or her permission for you to speak on their behalf to emergency, primary and behavioral health care providers. Present your list of concerns, observations and all background information.

Your loved one won't give his or her permission? You still have options.

Under the privacy provisions of the federal Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA), medical personnel may not be able to talk to you about a loved one or friend but you can tell medical professionals what you know and have observed. Hopefully, your input will help provide direction for emergency assessments, treatment and referrals.

(6) From the emergency room, contact your loved one's pediatrician, family doctor, specialists or primary care facility. Family history, medications and undiagnosed medical problems are just a few issues that can impact on a person's physical and behavioral well being and ability to cope. Knowledge of these changes could help in the assessment process.

Request patient information between emergency room personnel, primary care as well as specialty care doctors be exchanged. Follow-up to make sure medical records and reports were received on both ends.

(7) Not an emergency but still concerned? Ask for help and direction. Write a list of concerns, observations, past and current medical issues and health care challenges as well as any thoughts of depression and suicide. Share your concerns with a trusted family member or friend, emergency room personnel, primary health care doctor, health insurance company, behavioral health care provider or social service coordinator.

Call The Samaritans Listening Line or visit our website for more information.

(8) Do you know an adult who has lost a loved one to suicide? In addition to encouraging follow-up care with a primary care doctor, we welcome adults left behind by a loved one's suicide to learn more about our Safe Place program. Established in 1986, our free support group has provided comfort and nonjudgmental befriending to many Rhode Islanders. If a child has lost a loved one to suicide, please coordinate care with the child's pediatrician. Unfortunately, we cannot accept children in our program.

(9) Is your loved one suffering from depression or are you a caregiver stressed by worry? Need to talk? Call a friend at The Samaritans, RI's most trusted listening line since 1977. The Samaritans, providing free confidential, nonjudgmental befriending, can be the gateway to care and a lifetime of support. Our Hotline/Listening Line number is 401.272.4044 or toll-free in RI 1.800.365.4044.

Note; The Samaritans does not replace professional medical, mental health, social service or pastoral care. However, we provide supportive services between appointments or when family and friends are not available. Hotline/Listening Line support is also available to callers when professional services are no longer an option.

****If someone is at immediate risk of suicide, please call RI Emergency 911!***

DEPRESSION IS TREATABLE, SUICIDE IS PREVENTABLE BUT YOU HAVE TO ASK FOR HELP!

Learn the warning signs for suicide @ www.samaritansri.org

**Talk to a nonjudgmental volunteer at The Samaritans of RI.
(401) 272-4044
or state-wide at 1-800-365-4044.**

The Samaritans' hotline is open 24/7 depending on the hourly/daily availability of volunteers.

Please consider donating to The Samaritans of Rhode Island via PayPal at www.samaritansri.org



What to do if a family member or friend threatens suicide.

A checklist for emergency care in Rhode Island

Established in 1977, The Samaritans of RI remains the state's most trusted name in suicide prevention.