

Facing the Numbers

According to the Rhode Island Department of Health, in 1997, 24% of high school students seriously considered suicide. Between 1999 and 2002, 343 young people under the age of 20 were hospitalized for suicide attempts in Rhode Island.

These numbers might be much higher. When people die by drug overdoses or in car accidents, were these accidents or suicides? No one knows.

Young men kill themselves in higher numbers than young women. Women, however, are still very much at risk. They attempt suicide three times as often.

Today, the teen suicide rate is increasing. This is thought to be because of easy access to firearms and pills; increasing peer pressure; the intense competition for good grades and college admission; and violence in media and our society.

Can I Tell Someone?

Feelings of depression and suicide are treatable, with the right help. It can be a huge burden to know that a friend is suicidal. The idea that suicide may be preventable with the right help should guide your decision to break the confidence. If the suicidal person confronts you about breaking the confidence, tell him or her that you did it

because you care and you don't want that person to die. A good friend would always tell a trusted adult when another friend shares the fact that he or she is contemplating suicide.

Coping With Pressure

Many people experience feelings of depression when faced with the pressures of life. Being successful means learning to cope with stress and difficulty.

The traits below are typically shared by people who experience success in their lives. How do you relate to the list? Share your feelings with someone you trust. Share your feelings with a Samaritan.

- Able to Handle Challenges
- Flexible
- High Self Esteem
- Realistic Expectations
- Acknowledges Feelings
- Accepts Responsibility
- Asks For Help When Needed

Where can you learn these traits for success? By staying in school, by finding a mentor, through community service and by participating in sports, clubs, after school programs, religious youth groups, and at after school or summer jobs.

**Visit our Teen Pages at:
www.samaritansri.org**



How To Help Friends Who Are Depressed or Suicidal

www.samaritansri.org

**The Samaritans, Inc.
Rhode Island's Suicide Prevention
Resource Center**

**Free, Confidential
Hotline:
272-4044 or
(800) 365-4044**

**(Available 24 hours a day,
365 days a year, depending on the
availability of volunteers within a
24 hour period)**

Hearing Their Call

Imagine you're walking along the deserted shores of a lake. You suddenly hear some screams for help. Looking out across the lake, you see a person who has fallen out of a boat, has no life preserver, and is sinking.

What would you do? Lecture about safety? Reminisce how you did the same thing once? Say you'd love to help but you need to go eat supper?

Would you say any of these things? Of course not. You'd take immediate, life-saving action. You'd find a way to provide instant help. People who are depressed or considering suicide are very much like this figure on the lake. They're drowning—in pain and feeling hopeless. They need someone to care. They signal their desperation. They are crying for your help.

What You Should Say

Just as with person in the lake, depressed people don't need your opinions or your similar experiences. They don't even need (or want) solutions. What these people want the most is for you to *listen*—with sincerity and care, with interest and without judgment.

Maybe you have a friend about whom you're worried. Maybe he or she has written poems about dying. Find some private time with your friend as soon as possible. Begin by saying, "Is there something bothering you that you want to talk about? I'll be glad to listen."

Your friend might then reveal something that happened at home, at school, or in a relationship. You then might ask any of these questions: "How did you feel about that?" "How did that make you feel?" "Did that hurt your feelings?" "What are you feeling, right now, this very minute?"

Gently offer your questions. Let your friend know that he can talk to you safely and confidentially. Demonstrate that you will listen patiently.

Did you notice how the previous questions directed themselves to your friend's feelings? It is called *steering into the pain*. You want your friend to talk about and explore his feelings of despair, hopelessness, anger, or hurt.

One of the most harmful misconceptions about suicide is the fear that you'll "plant the idea" if you raise the issue of suicide. *Nothing could be further from the truth*. By raising the issue, you will *not* push people into considering or attempting suicide.

What Signs To Look For

People who are depressed or suicidal frequently show their feelings in any of the following ways:

- Talking about, writing about, hinting at, or threatening suicide (*Such threats precede four out of five deaths by suicide*)
- Drug abuse
- Drastic changes in personality (for example, a person might become rebellious or reckless)
- Losing interest in their favorite activities
- Sleeping too little or too much
- No appetite or overeating
- Previous suicide attempts (people with past attempts are especially high-risk)
- Giving away prized possessions
- Constant exhaustion
- Not caring
- Doing poorly in school
- Withdrawing from friends
- Drastic changes in appearance
- Feelings of hopelessness or helplessness
- Always arguing with friends or family

This list is not complete; these are just some of the more common signs.