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A quarterly newsletter of INVEST EAP

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INVEST



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Supporting a Healthy Organization

Volume 16

Issue 4

Fall 2014

SUICIDE AWARENESS

Several recent high profile deaths due to suicide have brought renewed attention to one of the most gut-wrenching situations imaginable: when someone we know and care about hurts so deeply that we fear for their safety.

Sometimes we worry about a person due to a 'gut feeling' that something is wrong, while at other times our concern stems from statements made or a trend toward isolation and withdrawal. Knowledge of difficult events, health issues, or personal losses may also raise our concerns about vulnerability to despair. However vague or specific your reasons may be for fearing that someone you love is seriously depressed or considering hurting themselves, you can – and should – take action.

Supporting the Depressed Person: First Steps

Letting the depressed person know you are concerned about them is the first place to start. Seek feedback on how he or she feels, and share your own observations of changing behavior, mood, or patterns. Express empathy and your desire to be supportive, while avoiding efforts to cheer the person out of their feelings or suggesting well-intended

yet simplistic solutions to a complex issue. Communicating that you care, wish to understand their experience, and will patiently listen are the best ways to build trust and encourage communication.

Practical suggestions and action steps can be to recommend a health checkup with the primary care provider or with a counselor. Ask if you can make the call with him or her, especially if you are concerned about imminent threat of harm. Also, offer to accompany him or her to any appointments both for moral support and for the valuable information you can bring to a review of the situation to date.

Try an approach that does not attempt to diagnose or project into the future; take one step at a time and understand that reducing additional overwhelm – for either of you – may help move you forward.

Promoting Safety

When you fear a family member or friend may attempt self-harm, professional assessment is necessary. Worries of imminent danger indicate a call to 911 or going to your local emergency room. Community mental health teams may be available as well for on-site

crisis intervention. EAP can help you navigate these steps.

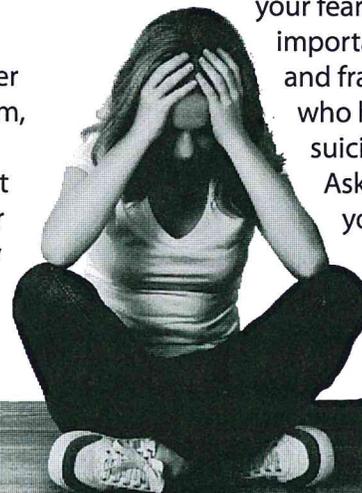
Any weapons in the home should be secured or removed to where the potentially suicidal person cannot access them. Medications that could be used for self-harm should also be safely stored, as well as car keys.

When a person has expressed thoughts of harming him or herself, make plans to assure they are not left alone – work with other family and friends to plan for keeping your vulnerable loved one within arms length at all times. Knowing that someone has an eye on the suicidal person can give you space to make phone calls, set up appointments, and gain assistance in creating a safety plan.

Contract for safety: gain a sense of your loved one's intentions

As intimidating and paralyzing as your fears may be, it is vitally important to talk directly and frankly to the person who has expressed suicidal thoughts.

Ask him or her, "Do you intend to hurt yourself or end your life?" and follow up with, "Do you have



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a specific plan?" Answering "yes" to either of these indicates that there is the need for emergency support -- calling 911 or going to the hospital.

If your loved one answers "no" to either of your questions, simply ask him or her, "Will you agree to not hurt yourself?" and, "Will you agree to tell me if your feelings change?" This contract may seem a minimalist exchange, but the power of your direct request and their affirmation can be significant. But if he or she will not agree to this contract for safety, that is when you should move to a next level plan of accessing professional help.

Short and long term plans

Safety for the suicidal person is the immediate need and the focus of the short-term plan. Accessing help, assessment, and stabilization is top priority.

The long-term plan begins to form once your loved one is stabilized. This should include ongoing medical and mental health support in order to deal with the root cause of feelings and beliefs that were so intense that suicide was considered as an option. Individuals who have experienced

suicidal thoughts or plans will vary greatly in what brought them to that place, and what will be needed to move forward. Patience, calm, and stability are core qualities that family members and friends will need to employ in order to help their loved one recover.

Self-care for you

As a supporter of someone depressed or suicidal, your own self-care cannot be emphasized enough. Your caregiving and state of high alert puts you at risk for exhaustion, poor nutrition, and heightened anxiety. These factors can give normal activities the potential for hazard – distracted driving, forgetting medications, potential stumbles and other accidents. Safeguard your wellbeing by ensuring you have enough support and are not alone 'on point' as you work to protect your loved one. Accept offers of help like meal delivery from friends, or utilize takeout during high stress times. Remember to stay hydrated, and avoid temptation to rely overly on alcohol to relax. Get physical exercise and talk to your own primary care provider if sleep or anxiety issues are proving to be unmanageably

disruptive. Obtain a private, professional sounding board to assure your own emotional health: call EAP for a free and confidential referral.

Understand the limits of your control

When someone we love feels lost to us in hurt and pain, feelings of powerlessness are terribly frightening. Being confronted by the reality that there are limits to our influence can paralyze or panic us in relation to another's despair. But the reality is indeed that we can only try our best to access help, promote safety, and express our love, concern, and hope. Actions are controlled by the individual, and we are painfully aware that suicidal people may go on to end their lives in spite of tremendous efforts by all involved.

The support of a mental health professional can help you as caregiver/loved one/concerned friend to gain a better understanding and normalization of both the limits of your control as well as the potential you hold to help the person about whom you are concerned.

INVEST EAP invites you to reach out for support, 24/7: 800-287-2173.



If you are concerned that a loved one is at risk for suicide, take action. Call 911 or go to the ER if you fear imminent risk.

Engage the depressed/potentially suicidal person by asking them if they have suicidal thoughts or a plan to act on those thoughts. If they do, access emergency help. If they don't, openly ask them to contract with you for safety.

Offer to help coordinate care to obtain assistance for the long term – call EAP as a great place to start.

Prioritize self-care even as you are caring for your loved one.

Learn more about depression and suicide to better understand realistic ways to help as well as the limits of your control.

RESOURCES

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

Established by the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). No matter what problems you are dealing with, we want to help you find a reason to keep living. By calling **1-800-273-TALK (8255)** you'll be connected to a skilled, trained counselor at a crisis center in your area, **anytime 24/7**.

Risk Factors for Suicide / Protective Factors

Learn more about what to look for when you are worried, as well as what factors may positively impact and protect an individual: <https://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/Learn/RiskFactors>

EAP SERVICES

EAP is here to help. For more information about articles in this newsletter, or any other EAP-related topic, please call one of our trained counselors at our toll-free number:

800-287-2173 • www.investeap.org

