



Fact Sheet

SUICIDE

Every 3 minutes someone in Canada tries to take their own life.

Although this Fact Sheet was created with input from consumers of mental health services, psychologists and psychiatrists, the information is of a general nature. More comprehensive information can be obtained from libraries, including Ontario Division, and your local CMHA branch.

Suicide is a great tragedy, especially in young people, and is more common than most people realize. Many suicides can be prevented, and the first step in solving any problem is knowing more about it. Many times suicidal actions are a desperate “cry for help”. Suicide at any age is a devastating event for the survivors. Grief, guilt, shame, shock, disbelief are common feelings. Individuals with these feelings commonly need to be spoken to, listened to, held and reached out to. Grief education and bereavement counselling can really help.

WHY DO PEOPLE TAKE THEIR OWN LIFE?

There is no simple answer as to why a person takes his or her own life. The majority of persons who commit suicide are uncertain about taking their life, but an overwhelming feeling of hopelessness, no one to turn to, and lack of hope about the future can provoke a suicide. Additional factors can be:

- Family tension
- Feelings of isolation
- Loss of a job
- Financial pressures
- Loss of a loved one
- Loss of good health
- Prolonged depression
- Alcohol & drugs

Are suicide attempters just looking for attention?

While attention is what they indeed often receive, individuals who attempt suicide do so for a wide variety of complex reasons. Dismissing suicide attempts as attention-seeking actions can lead to intentional or unintentional loss of life.

Can asking a person to discuss their suicidal thoughts and feelings trigger a suicide attempt?

The opportunity to share their fears and thoughts about death is welcomed by persons-at-risk. Open communication about their feelings and thoughts will take away the taboo associated to suicide and allow the person to explore and problem solve other alternatives to suicide. Not allowing the person to discuss their suicidal thoughts will leave them feeling much more alone in their despair.

SUICIDE STATISTICS

- More than 3500 Canadian's kill themselves each year
- 1 in every 25 Canadians attempts suicide during their lifetime
- Ranks as the second leading cause of death for males aged 22-44 and third for females 22-44
- 90% of suicides occur at home

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS?

People planning suicide often leave clues and communicate their plans to other, but many people do not take such threats seriously. Individuals expressing suicidal intentions should always be taken seriously. Examples: verbal suicide threats "you would be better off without me"; personality changes or odd behaviour; giving away prized possessions; getting affairs in order; isolation from friends and family. A sense of loss and hopelessness are commonly seen in people suffering from depression. It is surprising that depressed people often commit suicide when their symptoms seem to be improving. People who are suicidal generally believe they can't be helped and see no reason to go on living. The fact is that treatment for depression is remarkably successful in helping people return to full and active lives.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

Be Observant: Know and recognize possible warning signs and pay attention to your suspicions.

Check It Out: Inquire about less noticeable signs and ask others what they have noticed.

Reach Out: Show you care and listen to what they are saying.

Ask About Suicide: Ask directly about suicidal thoughts and plans for self harm.

Show Respect: Take the situation seriously and be honest, genuine, and understanding.

Be Involved: Allow the person to talk openly and freely about their feelings.

Determine Risk: Ask about previous attempts and for details of the suicide plan. The more detailed and thought out the plan the more the person becomes at a higher risk for following through with suicidal plans.

Offer Support: Offer realistic hope and identify supports or resources that could be of assistance such as family, friends, community mental health agency, counsellors, Employee Assistance Programs, clergy, social groups, ect....

Get Help: Urge the person to get help and be firm with you intentions to get help for them if they won't. Avoid secrecy pacts and do not leave the person alone if the risk for suicide is high.

WHERE CAN I GO FOR HELP?

Remember you are not alone. Reaching out for help and knowing where to go for positive support can prevent a tragedy. You may want to contact your family physician, or your local branch of the Canadian

Mental Health Association for information and referrals.