

SUICIDE PREVENTION



It is estimated that approximately 2,000 Australians die from suicide annually. For every person who dies in this way, it is estimated there are at least another 30 people who attempt suicide. Suicidal behaviour tends to be more common in women than men, and there is a significant association between mental health problems and suicidal behaviour. See also: www.sane.org/information/factsheets-podcasts/211-suicidal-behaviour-and-self-harm

Factors associated with higher risk of suicide include:

- Talking about feeling hopeless and helpless
- Threatening to hurt or kill themselves
- Being socially isolated
- Having a recent loss – relationship, death of a loved on, job loss
- Increased drug or alcohol use
- Making a previous suicide attempt or talking about death, dying or suicide
- Withdrawal from friends, family or society
- Having a friend, family member or work colleague who has died by suicide
- Having a mental illness
- Behaving in a risky manner – drugs, alcohol abuse, driving recklessly



Responding to or assisting a suicidal employee

1. Ask and offer support

- If you suspect that an employee may be at risk of suicide it is important to ask them directly about their thoughts and plans. Using the word suicide will not put the idea in their minds or make them act. Questions such as 'are you having thoughts of suicide or thinking about killing yourself' are not inappropriate
- Tell them that you care, that you are concerned and that you would like to assist them. Express empathy for them and their situation
- Inform them that thoughts of suicide are common and do not have to be acted upon and that other options exist

2. Assess

To determine whether an employee has serious intentions to take their life, as opposed expressing more vague thoughts of hopelessness, you need to ascertain whether they have a plan.

To determine this you need to ask them:

- Whether they have decided about what means they would use to kill themselves
- Have they decided when they will carry out the plan
- What steps have they taken towards following through with the plan

A higher level of planning indicates a more serious risk of follow through. Risk factors such as alcohol and drug use or previous attempts can sometimes indicate that the employee is more likely to follow through with their threat.

It is important to note that even in the absence of a plan threats of suicide must be taken seriously.

3. Act

- Inform them that there are other alternatives to suicide
- Offer them safety contacts, this may be to telephone a help-line, friend, family or professional support person
- Do not agree to keep a plan for suicide a secret. Do inform them of action you are going to take to assist them
 - Contact the Crisis Assessment Team (CAT, <http://www.deakin.edu.au/hr/ohs/assistance.php>) at the local hospital or the Police. Inform them that you are with an employee who is suicidal, has a plan and that you fear for their safety
- Do not leave the employee alone, stay with them until they can be linked in with supports

4. Self Care

Supporting someone or responding to someone who is contemplating suicide is very demanding and it is important to acknowledge this and seek support for one's self.

- Seek out supports to debrief with or talk to. This may be a friend, family member, colleague, professional support such as Employee Assistance Program (<http://www.deakin.edu.au/hr/ohs/assistance.php>) or a help line
- Remember that you can only do your best to assist someone and that sometimes despite best efforts some people will still take their lives. This is not your fault.

See further: www.mhfa.com.au/documents/guidelines/8191_MHFA_suicide_guidelines.pdf

For more information on suicide prevention, visit:

www.sane.org/information/factsheets-podcasts/434-sane-steps-how-to-help-when-someone-is-suicidal
www.mhfa.com.au/documents/guidelines/8191_MHFA_suicide_guidelines.pdf