



Suicide Prevention Speakers Bureau

Hello, my name is _____, and I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you about a very important subject. That being, suicide prevention.

It is likely that everyone in the room has been touched by suicide. I am part of a volunteer group that is trying to inform and educate people in our community so that we are better aware of how to prevent suicide. I will talk to you about suicide warning signs, risk factors, how to converse about someone who you think may be suicidal, and maybe most important, what we can do earlier in a person's life to reduce the chances of anyone ever reaching the high risk factors of suicide.

Before I start, I want to cite the sources for this information which follows. We are the messengers of what the research and studies show regarding suicide prevention. The two sources I am using during my speech come from the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention and www.sprc.org/about-suicide/risk-protective-factors. The people working for these organizations are the experts.

Risk Factors

- Family history of suicide
- Family history of child maltreatment
- Previous suicide attempt(s)
- History of mental disorders, particularly clinical depression
- History of alcohol and substance abuse
- Feelings of hopelessness
- Impulsive or aggressive tendencies
- Cultural and religious beliefs (e.g., belief that suicide is noble resolution of a personal dilemma)
- Local epidemics of suicide
- Isolation, a feeling of being cut off from other people
- Barriers to accessing mental health treatment
- Loss (relational, social, work, or financial)
- Physical illness
- Easy access to lethal methods
- Unwillingness to seek help because of the stigma attached to mental health and substance abuse disorders or to suicidal thoughts

Talk about it

Discussing suicide: How to start a conversation

It is important to ask the person directly if they are feeling suicidal or if they have been thinking about suicide.

It is a myth that talking directly about suicide will put the idea in their head. Instead, discussing suicide openly and honestly about what you've noticed and genuinely asking how they are feeling can give the person the opportunity to take the first steps towards getting the help they need. Listed below are some ideas to help you start the conversation:

- "I've noticed that you haven't been yourself lately, is everything ok with you?"
- "I'm worried about you. I'm wondering if we can talk about what's troubling you?"
- "You've seemed really (down/sad/angry/unhappy) lately. I'm worried that you might be thinking of hurting yourself or suicide. Can we talk about this?"

Expressing your concerns to a suicidal loved one

- Let the person at risk know that you are concerned and that you care. Often, knowing another person cares enough to become involved and listen to them can be a great comfort to someone who is suicidal.
- Let the person know that you have noticed a change in them; A change in behavior and feelings or something that they have said that might have alerted you
- It is important to simply describe what you have observed rather than use words that convey judgment such as 'good' and 'bad'. If the person feels judged, they might feel embarrassed or withdraw.
- Be honest and genuine in your concern.

Having expressed your concern and conveyed your support, keep the following in mind

- Acknowledge that you understand that the person is experiencing a lot of pain at present.
- Show respect and be as understanding as possible about their situation.
- Maintain eye contact and open body language.
- When discussing suicide, ensure you listen carefully to what they have to say. Use active listening techniques, such as paraphrasing what the person has said, reciting it back to them to ensure you understand them.
- Avoid minimizing or dismissing their problems, ensure they know you're taking them seriously.
- Avoid using statements such as "You don't know how lucky you are" or "You shouldn't feel like that", these might sound to the person as though you are judging them and minimizing how they are feeling.
- Remind the person that although they may be having thoughts of suicide, they can choose not to act on them.
- Offer realistic hope, it is possible for situations to improve or change for the better. It is likely that their problems weren't created overnight, therefore the situation will probably take time to resolve. But their problem is resolvable through other means.
- If they are feeling suicidal, the next step is to support them to get professional help.

Warning signs

- Talking about wanting to die or to kill themselves
- Looking for a way to kill themselves, like searching online or buying a gun
- Talking about feeling hopeless or having no reason to live
- Talking about feeling trapped or in unbearable pain
- Talking about being a burden to others
- Increasing the use of alcohol or drugs
- Acting anxious or agitated; behaving recklessly
- Sleeping too little or too much
- Withdrawing or isolating themselves
- Showing rage or talking about seeking revenge
- Extreme mood swings

Upstream Prevention

What we want to see in our ourselves and our neighbors in Canby is suicide resilience which is defined as “*the perceived ability, resources, or competence to regulate suicide-related thoughts, feelings, and attitudes*”(Osman et al., 2004, p. 1351).

Protective factors then are personal or environmental characteristics that help strengthen a person’s suicide resilience.

Protective Factors for strengthening suicide resilience include:

- **Connectedness** to individuals, family, community, and social institutions
- **Life skills including:**
 - Problem solving skills
 - Conflict management and resolution
 - Stress management
 - Change management
 - Handling problems in a non-violent way
 - Emotional coping skills
- **Purpose** or meaning in life
- **Dignity** and self-esteem at normal levels
- **Mental health care** is accessible and effective
- **Beliefs** in Cultural, religious, or personal ways that discourage suicide
- **Restricted access** to lethal means

<https://www.sprc.org/about-suicide/risk-protective-factors>

In summary, I appreciate your listening. We can make a difference in our community. If you have any questions or thoughts, I’d be glad to take them. Whatever questions you may have that I don’t have the answers to, I will be glad to do some research and get back with you.

Please write down the phone numbers of both the National Suicide Prevention Hotline 1-800-273 8255 and the Clackamas County Suicide Prevention Hotline 503-655 8255. They will be happy to assist you.

Lastly, if you would be interested in joining our efforts, we would love to have your help. My phone number is _____. Thank you again for making a difference.