

Suicide in Corrections: How to help when someone you know might be thinking about suicide



Common thoughts that keep people from reaching out...

I was afraid to ask about suicidal thoughts

You cannot give someone the idea of committing suicide

What if I am wrong?

Trust your gut! If you are getting a feeling that someone may hurt him/herself, go with your instinct and reach out.

If he/she is really suicidal, won't be able to stop him/her.

Suicidal thoughts are often impulsive and temporary. If you can get the person past the impulse and on to proper assistance, he or she will often recover and go on with life.

Suicidal people want to die

Most people thinking of suicide want a way out of intolerable physical and emotional pain. Some part of them wants to live and you can help them find a way to do it

So What Can I Do?

Eighty-five percent of people who commit suicide tell someone first – through actions or statements. As a colleague, you may be the first person to see or hear these warning signs. If you think someone may be having thoughts about harming him/herself:

- Trust your instincts
- Reach out as soon as possible
- Ask “are you thinking about hurting yourself?”

Once you have confirmed that the person is having thoughts of harming him/herself:

- Urge them to call EAP – or make the call with them
- Ascertain if the person has a plan
- Ask permission to secure weapon(s) they may have, if necessary
- Notify a supervisor
- Do not leave person alone
- Help designate necessary duties such as child care until the crisis is resolved
- Get debriefed when the situation is resolved – for your own peace of mind

If I say something that person's career is over

The department's top priority is employee health, wellness and safety. Someone's career is not over because they are struggling or facing a difficult time in their life. Our primary focus is it to get that employee the help they need to regain positive mental, emotional, and physical well-being.

Your best option is to think in terms of necessary and sufficient force. Intervene as much as is necessary to keep the person alive and get him or her assistance.

HOW WILL YOU RESPOND WHEN A CO-WORKER NEEDS ASSISTANCE?

Why Do People Commit Suicide?

- Psychological/Physical Pain
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Relationship Problems
- Being under investigation

Alcohol or other drug problems significantly increase the risk for suicide

Why is suicide among correctional staff a concern?

You should be aware that:

- ✚ Most people who commit suicide communicate their intentions ahead of time
- ✚ Alcohol increases the risk for suicide
- ✚ Suicide has a devastating effect on family, friends, and colleagues

Correctional staff, in particular, should be aware that:

- ✚ The suicide rate for correctional officers/correctional staff is twice as high as the rate of police officers and the general population
- ✚ Many staff members experience some level of PTSD during their careers

LOOKING OUT FOR YOUR CO-WORKER

Correctional staff do not hesitate to protect fellow staff when an inmate is threatening them –

--But what if your colleague is threatening his/her own life?

If you think a co-worker is contemplating suicide, will you take action? Will you have the courage to step in and make a **difference**?

Risk Factors/Indicators For Someone to Commit Suicide

- ❖ Recent loss (real or perceived)
- ❖ Recent increase in problems (under investigation, financial, marital, work)
- ❖ Sadness and/or depression
- ❖ Irritability or increased conflict with others
- ❖ Sudden drop in job performance
- ❖ Hopelessness or having no future-oriented plans
- ❖ Social isolation or withdrawal
- ❖ Increased alcohol or drug use
- ❖ Sleep or appetite problems
- ❖ Constricted thinking – rigid thinking or thoughts that issues are black and white only
- ❖ Increased risk-taking behavior

AID LIFE

- A** – Ask. Don't hesitate to ask, "Are you thinking about suicide?"
- I** – Intervene immediately. Take action. Listen and let the person know he or she is not alone
- D** – Don't keep it a secret
- L** – Locate Help. Seek out a professional, human resources, friend, family member or supervisor
- I** – Involve superiors. Supervisors can secure immediate and long-term assistance
- F** – Find someone to stat with the person now. Don't leave the person alone
- E** – Expedite. Get help now. An at-risk person needs immediate attention from professionals

Tips for Coping:

Cherish your family
Congratulate yourself on victories
Create an outside hobby
Celebrate the good things in life
Eat Healthy and exercise regularly
Remember your priorities in life

**** Your job should not be your first priority. It should not define who you are, but rather be something that you do.**

Those at risk for suicide might:

- Give away possessions or prepare for death (will, correcting beneficiary information, etc)
- Talk about suicide
- Make viable plans and means
- Have a history of suicidal behavior
- Practice the plan or means of suicide (suicide rehearsal)

While few of these actions themselves are a guarantee the person is feeling suicidal, each of these should alert a co-worker/fellow officer to be concerned and start asking questions.

Remember, suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem