



Warning Signs for Suicide Prevention

Setting
Multiple

Type of Program
Protocols & Guidelines

NSSP Goals Addressed
6.0, 7.0

Program Description

The *Warning Signs for Suicide Prevention* was developed by an expert working group convened by the American Association of Suicidology. Citing the importance of distinguishing warning signs from risk factors, the group defined warning signs as the earliest detectable signs that indicate heightened risk for suicide *in the near-term* (i.e., within minutes, hours, or days), as opposed to risk factors which suggest longer-term risk (i.e., a year to lifetime.) They also noted that, aside from direct statements or behaviors threatening suicide, it is often a constellation of signs that raises concern, rather than one or two symptoms alone. The working group presented the warning signs in a hierarchical manner, organized by degree of risk, and emphasized the importance of including clear and specific direction about what to do if someone exhibits warning signs in information campaigns or education programs (Table 1).

Table 1: *Warning Signs for Suicide* and Corresponding Actions

Call 9-1-1 or seek immediate help from a mental health provider when you hear, or see any of these behaviors.

- Someone threatening to hurt or kill him/herself, or talking of wanting to hurt or kill him/herself
- Someone looking for ways to kill him/herself by seeking access to firearms, available pills, or other means
- Someone talking or writing about death, dying or suicide, when these actions are out of the ordinary for the person

Seek help by contacting a mental health professional or calling 1-800-273-TALK for a referral should you witness, hear, or see anyone exhibiting any one or more of these behaviors

- Hopelessness
- Rage, uncontrolled anger, seeking revenge
- Acting reckless or engaging in risky activities, seemingly without thinking
- Feeling trapped - like there's no way out
- Increased alcohol or drug use
- Withdrawing from friends, family and society
- Anxiety, agitation, unable to sleep or sleeping all the time
- Dramatic mood changes

Program Development

The expert review and consensus process was informed by a review of relevant research literature. Additional information about the warning signs can be found in the following published article (additional relevant articles are contained in the same volume).

Rudd, M. D., Berman, A. L., Joiner, T. E., Jr., Nock, M. K., Silverman, M. M., Mandrusiak, M., et al. (2006). Warning signs for suicide: Theory, research, and clinical applications. *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, 36(3), 255-262. (Available for free at www.atypon-link.com/GPI/doi/abs/10.1521/suli.2006.36.3.255.)

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Costs

The study that identified the *Warning Signs for Suicide Prevention* is available for free. It can be downloaded from the Guilford Publications website at the link above.

*The content of programs listed in Section II (Expert and Consensus Statements) of the SPRC/AFSP Best Practices Registry address specific goals of the *National Strategy for Suicide Prevention* and have been reviewed by a panel of three suicide prevention experts and found to meet standards of importance, likelihood of meeting objectives, accuracy, safety, congruence with prevailing knowledge, and appropriateness of development process. Programs were not reviewed for evidence of effectiveness. Additional information about the Best Practices Registry can be found at www.sprc.org.

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