

# Your Health Voice

## Home Health Care Wisdom for Suicide Prevention and Risk Awareness

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), suicide is the second leading cause of death in people ages 10 to 34, the fourth leading cause of death in people ages 35 to 50, and the eighth leading cause of death in people ages 55 to 64. Alarming, the United States has seen a 41 percent increase in suicide from 1999 to 2016 among Americans ages 25 to 64. It is clear that America is facing a public-health crisis related to mental and behavioral health.

September is National Suicide Prevention Awareness Month, and an excellent time to review some of the signs and symptoms that may indicate that someone in your community or even your family may be at increased risk for suicide or other mental health issues that could be leading in that direction.

In my work as the Associate Director for Community Mental Health Programs and Clinical Operations at the Visiting Nurse Service of New York (VNSNY), I work with a team of experts who are trained to observe and skillfully respond to people of all ages who may be struggling with mental health issues. We work with people from all walks of life and all ages, from very young children to the most elderly members of our communities. We meet people every day who are afraid to ask for help because they feel a sense of stigma at having difficulty, or they may live or work in situations where speaking up about what they are feeling does not feel safe or comfortable for a variety of reasons.

My colleagues at VNSNY and I work closely and confidentially with organizations like NYC Well to help people who believe they may have problems with depression, stress, anxiety, or drug or alcohol misuse. No one should feel that they have to suffer alone. Private, cost-free care is available for anyone in our community who needs help. If you suspect someone might be in need of help you can call NYC Well at 1-888-NYC-WELL (1-888-692-9355), text "WELL" to 65173 or put "NYC Well" into your computer's search engine.

Here are a few guidelines to keep in mind if you suspect a loved one may be having suicidal thoughts, or in need of help for mental health issues:

- **Talk About It** – In many cultures, social circles, or families, talking about suicide or mental illness is considered "taboo." Some believe speaking of suicide can make a person weak or will bring their suicidal thoughts to fruition. In fact, talking about our struggles is often a first step to getting the help we need and can be a vital component in the recovery process. Seek help from a health professional if you notice that someone is: Talking about wanting to die, being a burden, feeling hopeless about a situation, not having a reason to live, or being in unbearable pain.
- **Listen Closely** – Phrases like, "I just want to give up," "I can't do this anymore," "Nothing I do is ever good enough," "There's nothing left for me," etc., may disguise suicidal thoughts and desires and are often the number one indicator that an individual is contemplating suicide. Other signs and symptoms to take note of include: hoarding pills, inquiring about ways to commit suicide, increased use of alcohol or drugs, or the start of a new habit, reckless behavior or uncharacteristic agitation or anxiety, even being less social can be a sign that someone is severely depressed or having suicidal thoughts.
- **Take It Seriously** – You might not realize that a friend or loved one is struggling. Be careful about just dismissing their communications saying, "It's going to be okay," or "Just get over it." Even if you are not certain about the situation, let the person know that you care and would like to help. If you notice any of the behaviors mentioned above, maintain eye contact, keep a calming tone, and an open demeanor and listen. Recognize that when someone is in pain, their sense of reality may differ greatly from your own.

- Seek Help – Help of all levels is possible. Whether someone is in need of brief reassurance and counseling, access to emergency medical services, or connection to long-term resources, there are people standing by at all hours of every day to provide care to those suffering from mental illness or suicidal thoughts.

To learn more about community mental health services that are available where you live, visit [VNSNY.org/community-mental-health-services](https://www.VNSNY.org/community-mental-health-services).

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