



Suicide Prevention: What to Look Out For

Tip Sheet

Many of us will be touched by suicide, through our work at AV, or in our personal lives. This tip sheet is for people who are concerned that someone in their life may be at increased risk of suicide.

Suicide and its causes are complex; death by suicide rarely occurs due to a single event. There are a range of biological, psychological, and social risk factors associated with suicide. People at risk of suicide often demonstrate warning signs or signal their intentions in some way. To prevent suicide, it is important to be aware of these risk factors and warning signs and respond to them appropriately.

Here are some risk factors for and warning signs of suicide to look out for:

Risk Factors

- Mental illness
- Male
- Rural location
- Family history of suicide
- Childhood trauma (e.g. childhood physical and/or sexual abuse)
- Alcohol or substance abuse
- Financial stress
- Perfectionist traits



Triggers

- Loss (of business, relationship, employment, bereavement)
- Suicide of someone they know or recognise
- Recent financial hardship
- Isolation from loved ones
- Increased job or school stress
- Potentially traumatic event (e.g. responding to a critical incident)



The **Ambulance Victoria Wellbeing & Support Services** is AV's internal mental health support service available 24/7 to all employees and their immediate family members, RANs, ACO's and CERTs providing 24-hour mental health and wellbeing support.

Having a conversation with someone you're concerned about

Prepare:

- Know what you want to say, and how you will respond.
- Prepare for the conversation to not go as expected, such as them denying any problems, or acknowledging greater risk than you anticipated.

Ask:

- If you are worried about someone's risk, it is best to be direct. Ask them "Are you thinking about suicide?"

Listen:

- Listen to their answer.
- Try to acknowledge and validate their emotions, without validating incorrect beliefs such as "it will never get better" or "I'm a burden to everyone".

Support:

- Take steps to keep the person safe.
- If risk is imminent, do not leave the person alone. Call Triple Zero (000) or take them to your nearest emergency department.
- Remove access to any lethal means.





Suicide Prevention: What to Look Out For

Tip Sheet

Warning Signs: Feelings

- Feelings of defeat and loss
- Feeling humiliated and fixated on the issue/unable to problem solve
- Feeling trapped or like there is no way out of the problem
- Feeling hopeless
- Feeling burdensome



Warning Signs: Behaviours

- Previous suicide attempt (particularly within past 12 months)
- Increased alcohol or drug use
- Withdrawing from friends, family, wider community
- Uncharacteristic or impaired judgement or behaviour (e.g. self-destructive, impulsive actions)
- Fearlessness/desensitisation to death and/or suicide
- Ability to visualise oneself deceased and the behaviours by others post-death



Warning Signs: Imminent Risk

- Has expressed intent to die
- Has a plan in mind
- Access to lethal means (e.g. stockpiling medication)
- Engaging in impulsive, aggressive, or anti-social behaviour

If you are concerned about someone exhibiting these risk factors and warning signs:

It is important that you respond quickly and discuss your concerns with them. The most important thing you can do is listen, and then help them to connect with mental-health support.

If the person is not at imminent risk of suicide, talk to them about who else they can tell to get the necessary support. Don't agree to keep it a secret; encourage them to involve others in order to keep themselves safe.

You can find more resources and helpful information on this topic on the Wellbeing and Support Services [Links and Resources](#) Intranet page and also in our [Videos and Podcasts](#).

- If risk is not imminent, discuss connecting them with social and professional supports (see list below).

References

Department of Health and Ageing. *Living Is For Everyone (LIFE): A Framework for Prevention of Suicide in Australia*. Canberra: Australian Government, 2007.

O'Connor, R.C. (2011). *Towards an integrated motivational-volitional model of suicidal behaviour*. *International handbook of suicide prevention: Research, policy and practice*, 1, 181-98.

There are lots of supports and services available, such as:

- 1800 MANERS; Press 2 for Counselling
- AV psychologists, or the VACU Network
vacu@ambulance.vic.gov.au
- Lifeline 13 11 14 or SuicideLine 1300 651 251
- Kids Helpline 1800 55 1800
- Beyond Blue
<https://beyondblue.org.au>
- Headspace
<https://headspace.org.au/>
- Local GP
- Other family and friends
- School counsellors, sports coaches, community and cultural leaders, etc.

If you believe someone is at imminent risk and cannot be left alone, please call Triple Zero (000) or take them to your nearest Emergency Department.

