

Supervisor NEWSLETTER

Employee Assistance Program
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A Manager's Guide to Suicide Prevention

By Jaime Carter-Seibert, MA, LMHC and Craig Nelson, LMHC, CEAP, SPHR, SHRM-SCP

According to the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC), suicide is a leading cause of death in the United States. In 2020, over 45k Americans died by suicide and 1.2 million adults attempted suicide.

There is hope, though. Nearly 75% of those who attempt suicide will tell someone first, directly or indirectly, opening a door to support and help. Friends, families, colleagues, and supervisors can provide a life-line through empathy and facilitating mental health care which is crucial for recovery. It's estimated that 90% of people who die by suicide have a diagnosable mental health condition, often coupled with substance abuse. Treating suicidality means addressing the underlying mental health issues that fuel it.

These warning signs in this chart can help you identify when someone is vulnerable to suicide so you guide them to help.

What To Do

Check to see if your company has a policy/procedure to follow if you have an employee that you consider to be at risk to harm themselves or others. In addition, the EAP offers the following suggestions that we hope you will find useful.

General Warning Signs	Warning Signs at Work	Risk Factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-occupation with death or talking about suicide: "I wish I was dead," "Everyone would be better off without me," "Life is too hard," etc. • Talking about a specific plan and/or intent to end one's own life • Ready actions: stock-piling medicine, buying a gun, giving away personal possessions, saying goodbyes to friends and family • Expressing feelings of: hopelessness, desperation or being "trapped," feeling like a burden to others, or being humiliated • Heavy or increased use of drugs or alcohol • Dramatic changes in mood • Suddenly feeling better after seeming very depressed • Withdrawal from friends and family 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Isolation and withdrawal • Low morale • Change in performance (positive and negative) • Aggression and conflict • Reactivity to "normal" situations • Being controlling or demanding • Competitiveness • Argumentativeness • Making warning statements • Recklessness • Frequent absences or lateness • Unrealistic expectations of self or others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health: pain and serious medical conditions, traumatic brain injury, mental illness • Environment: prolonged stress (bullying, harassment, relationship hardship, financial crisis, unemployment), access to lethal means, another's death by suicide • History: family history of suicide, previous attempts, childhood abuse or neglect

Continued on the next page.

If an employee confides to you concern about a colleague and the person *is at work*:

- Arrange to speak with the person of concern immediately in a private place. Express your concern about their wellbeing based on the specific statements or behaviors you've learned about. Don't be afraid to be direct and ask if the employee is having suicidal thoughts. Asking someone about suicide won't make the person do it. Rather, it conveys your concern for the person's safety and desire to help. Depending on their response, you may want to ask:
 - Do you have a plan to end your life?
 - Have you thought about when or where you might attempt suicide?
 - Are you going to try to take your own life?
 - Have you ever attempted in the past?
- Ask if the employee has a current mental health provider. If so, offer to contact the provider for them—you will still need to initiate an immediate supportive action such as calling the EAP.
- Don't try to convince someone they "shouldn't" feel suicidal. Instead, be empathetic, offer the person assistance with finding professional help, and tell the person that they aren't alone.

Next steps

- Offer to contact the EAP for immediate telephonic support with an EAP counselor.
- If the employee agrees to you calling the EAP, advise the EAP counselor of the situation and then allow the employee to speak confidentially with the counselor in your office and step out.
- Know that the EAP can assist the person with safety planning and next steps, and will tell you if they believe the employee needs immediate support, including transportation to a hospital emergency room.

If the employee is expressing serious and immediate suicidal ideation *with intent*:

- Be sure not to leave the person alone or let them leave the area alone.
- Remove any items that could be used for self-harm from the immediate area.
- Consider contacting a family member or friend to transport the person to the nearest hospital emergency room, or
- Facilitate transportation to nearest hospital emergency room.
- If the employee is unwilling to go to the hospital, call 911 immediately for a community assessment and support.

If an employee confides to you concern about a colleague and the person *is NOT at work*:

- Try to contact the person and talk with them about your concerns (see suggestions above).
- If you are worried that the person is in danger and are unable to reach them, call 911 and request a "welfare check." The police will be dispatched to the person's home to assess their safety and respond as necessary.
- Contact the EAP – an EAP Counselor can discuss the situation with you to identify next steps.

If you suspect an employee may be suicidal, take it seriously and *act immediately*. Either contact 911 immediately for an emergency response, or **you can reach your EAP 24/7 by calling (800) 777-4114 for consultation**. Please remember your EAP is here to support you as managers, as well as all of your employees.

References:

<https://www.cdc.gov/suicide/suicide-data-statistics.html>