

Talking to someone who may be suicidal

(Information adapted from Living Works ASIST Course and child.alberta.ca)

If you have a friend who is seriously considering suicide:

- Listen and acknowledge your friend's distress
- Encourage and support positive thinking and responses
- Invite your friend to do activities with you
- Ask if your friend is considering harming themselves or considering suicide
- If your friend is suicidal - talk about it and assist getting help
- Don't try to deal with this on your own, get others to help

Remember you cannot take responsibility for the actions of another but you can assist them in making a positive decision.

Ways you can talk to someone about their suicidal thoughts is by Connecting, Understanding and Assisting.

1. Connecting

- Listen to the problems the person presents.
- Observe signs that may indicate that person is thinking of suicide.
- Ask if the person is suicidal e.g. are you having thoughts of suicide
- If yes, listen to reason(s) why person wishes to die

2. Understanding

Assess the level of risk that the person will act on these suicidal thoughts by asking the following questions (ASIST calls this plan CPR i.e. Current suicide plan; Pain; Resources).

- a) Do they have a current plan? If so what is the plan, how prepared are they to act on this plan, how soon will they act on this plan and are they capable of acting on this plan.
- b) Is the pain they are feeling unbearable at times?
- c) Does the person feel there are resources in their life that are available to them e.g. family, friends, professionals, pets or internal resources such as beliefs.
- d) Check any related past history i.e. have they ever attempted suicide before?
- e) Do they have any mental health concerns for which they are receiving, or have received mental health care?

3. Assisting

Once you have established the person has suicidal thoughts and you have reviewed their risk of suicide, the next step is to try and ensure the person's safety. This can be achieved by entering into a contract with the person at risk. To help gain agreement to enter into this contract, use ambivalence i.e. part of the person wants to die but part of that person still wants to live.

If you believe the risk of suicide is eminent, this contract can be as short as getting the person at risk to a local hospital for help or an agreement to call the police for assistance. Other considerations when developing a plan can include:

- a) If they have a plan, how can you disable this plan e.g. if the person plans to overdose on drugs ask them to give you the pills they were going to use.
- b) If their pain is unbearable focus on how to ease this pain.
- c) Once resources are determined, link the person with these resources.
- d) If they have attempted suicide in the past, find out what helped them survive.
- e) If there are mental health concerns, connect them with their mental health worker.
- f) Decrease or stop the use of alcohol and drugs while the contract is in effect.