

Suicide: Prevention, Intervention, and Postvention

**Satellite Conference and Live Webcast
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Faculty

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Objectives

1. Participants will be able to list 3 signs of suicidal ideation.
2. Participants will know best practice interventions if they suspect a person is considering suicide.
3. Participants will have an increased level of confidence when working with individuals/families impacted by suicide.

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Definitions

- **Suicide:** Intentional self-harm resulting in death.
- **Suicide Attempt:** Self-harm with the intent of dying but the action does not result in death.
- **Suicidal Ideation:** Thoughts of suicide ranging from fleeting notions to creating a plan to end one's life.

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Suicide Throughout History

- In antiquity, Greek and Roman societies tended to have a relaxed attitude regarding suicide.
- Greek philosophers Aristotle and Pythagoras were opposed.
- Rome – forbidden in 3 situations
 - Soldiers
 - Slaves
 - Those accused of capital crimes

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Suicide Throughout History

- In the Middle Ages, views were heavily influenced by religion.
- All 3 Abrahamic religions oppose the taking of one's own life with the exception of martyrdom.
 - Strictly forbidden in Islam
 - Those who attempted or died by suicide were excommunicated from the church
 - Jews and Christians who died by suicide were typically buried outside of the consecrated graveyard or in a separate section
 - In Christianity, the person might be buried face down and/or in a North/South direction rather than East/West. Some were also buried with the feet facing West instead of East.

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Suicide Throughout History

- In the Middle Ages, views on suicide were also influenced by superstition.
- Profane burials were common and thought to be a deterrent.
 - Often times, suicide burials occurred at crossroads – perhaps to confuse the ghost, as they were believed to be susceptible to demonic control, or because executions were buried at crossroads.
 - Bodies may have been staked – a wooden stake driven through the heart – to prevent the soul from wandering since it was believed the soul of a person who died by suicide was doomed to wander the earth rather than entering a positive place in the afterlife.

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Suicide Throughout History

- In Modernity...
 - Suicide became more widely viewed as a criminal act around the 17th century.
 - Those who attempted and those who completed suicide were subject to criminal penalty.
 - By the 19th century, it was viewed as more of a mental illness, and by the mid-20th century, it was no longer considered a criminal act.

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Statistics (as of 2019)

- According to the CDC, suicide was the 10th leading cause of death, overall, in the United States.
- Suicide was the 2nd leading cause of death for ages 10 – 34 years of age.
- There were nearly 2.5 times as many suicides as homicides.

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Statistics (as of 2019)

- Half of all suicide deaths were by firearms.
- Approximately 1.35 million suicide attempts.
- Age-adjusted suicide rate increased by 35.2% from 1999 to 2018.
- Someone died by suicide every 11 minutes.
47,511 in the US 804 in Alabama

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Cause

When a crisis or crises overwhelm the ability to cope.

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Risk Factors

- Previous suicide attempts
- Feelings of helplessness or hopelessness
- Experiencing a stressful life event such as the loss of a loved one
- Substance abuse
- Having suicidal thoughts AND a firearm in the home

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Risk Factors

- History of a psychiatric disorder such as PTSD, Major Depression, Bipolar Disorder, etc.
- History of victimization (physical violence, emotional/sexual abuse)
- Physical condition causing depression (chronic or terminal illness)
- LGBTQ with unsupportive family
- Genetic link
- Loneliness and social isolation

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Prevention

- Know the warning signs...
 - Talking about wanting to die, guilt/shame, being a burden to others
 - Feeling empty, hopeless, extreme emotional or physical pain
 - Being overly anxious, sad, agitated, or filled with rage
 - Researching ways to die or making a plan
 - Saying goodbye or giving away possessions

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Prevention

- Know the warning signs...
 - Eating or sleeping more or less than usual
 - Extreme mood swings
 - Withdrawing from friends or activities
 - Taking extreme risks
 - Abusing drugs or alcohol

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Prevention

- Suicidal feelings are temporary.
- Let other people know how you are feeling.
- Ask for help.
- Let your doctor know you are feeling suicidal.
- Take prescriptions as directed.
- Remove means of self-harm.
- Call 911 or seek help from local emergency department.
- Never promise to keep suicidal thoughts a secret.

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Prevention

Suicide Prevention Hotline

(800) 273-8255

Option 1 for Veterans

Text for help

CONNECT to 741741

Chat at

suicidepreventionlifeline.org



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Intervention

- Take every threat seriously.
- Don't be afraid to ask the person if they are thinking about suicide.
- Do not dismiss their thoughts/feelings.
- Employ the assistance of others.
- Ask if the person has a plan and the means.

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Intervention

- Encourage them to exercise, get more sunshine, fresh air, etc.
- Give them a task to complete and let them know you will follow-up.
- Remove the means of self-harm.
- Do not leave the person alone.

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Intervention

- Make an appointment for them with mental health, medical provider, religious leader, etc.
- If the person has already inflicted self-harm, call 911.
- Find out what they have done and when.
- Ask as many questions as you can while waiting for paramedics/law enforcement to arrive.
- If they have overdosed, find out what, how many, and when.

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Intervention – What NOT To Do

- Do not use “reverse psychology”.
- Do not try to wrestle a weapon away from an actively suicidal person.
- It is no longer considered best practice to use a No Suicide Contract.

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Postvention

- After a suicide, as with any death, celebrate the life that was lived.
- Forgive yourself and others for “signs unseen”.
- Never avoid the loved ones left behind.

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Resources

- www.mayoclinic.org
- Danielle Gourevitch, “Suicide Among the Sick in Classical Antiquity.” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*. 43.6 (1969)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- Gwen Seaborne and Alice Seaborne. “The Law on Suicide in Medieval England.” *Journal of Legal History*.” 21.1 (2000)

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Resources

- Watt Jeffery Rodgers. (2004). “From Sin to Insanity: Suicide in Early Modern Europe.” Cornell University Press.
- www.bethe1to.com
- www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org
- <https://www.the-scientist.com/features/what-neurobiology-can-tell-us-about-suicide-66922>
- www.nimh.nih.gov

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