

Talkiatry

Recognize, Reach Out, Respond: How to Help Yourself or Someone You Care About

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Learning Objectives

How do I recognize signs of emotional distress?

How do I identify warning signs of suicide?

How do I approach someone who is in emotional distress?

How do I approach someone who is having thoughts of or talking about suicide or has arranged the means to harm or kill themselves?

Where do I go to seek help for myself or someone who is experiencing emotional distress or thoughts of suicide?

Where do I get help and how do I determine the appropriate level of help?

What is suicide?

- Suicide—"the act or an instance of ending one's own life voluntarily and intentionally"¹
- Suicidal ideations—thoughts or feelings of wanting to end one's life
 - Can be active (desire to do something to end one's life) or passive (desire to fall asleep and never wake up, one wishing they were no longer alive)
- Suicidal plan—a specific method of how one would end their own life
 - Can be well thought out or less specific
- Preparatory behaviors—steps one has taken to prepare to end their own life
- Suicide attempt—the person has intentionally but unsuccessfully attempted to end their own life
- Completed suicide—the person has intentionally ended their own life
- Non-suicidal self injurious behavior—when one voluntarily injures themselves without the intention of ending their own life

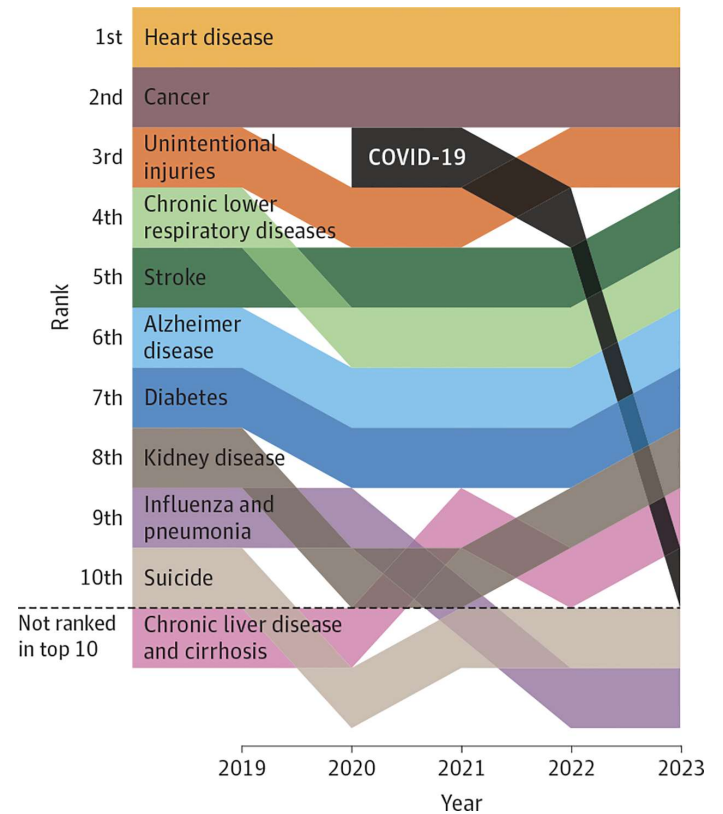
1. Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Suicide. In *Merriam-Webster.com dictionary*. Retrieved September 19, 2026, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/suicide>

Where does suicide rank as a cause of death?

- In 2024, there were a reported 48,824 deaths from suicide and a reported 515,099 reports of non-fatal self harm in the United States ¹
- Suicide is the 10th leading cause of death for all ages ²
- Suicide is the second leading cause of death for ages 10-34 ³

1. National Institute of Mental Health. (2026, August). *Suicide prevention*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Institutes of Health. <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/suicide-prevention>
2. Ahmad FB, Cisewski JA, Anderson RN. Leading Causes of Death in the US, 2019-2023. JAMA. 2024 Sep 24;332(12):957-958. doi: 10.1001/jama.2024.15563. PMID: 39116093; PMCID: PMC11874302.
3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2024). *WISQARS leading causes of death visualization tool*. WISQARS. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <https://wisqars.cdc.gov/lcd/?o=LCD&y1=2024&y2=2024&ct=10&cc=ALL&g=00&s=0&r=0&ry=2&e=0&ar=lcd1age&at=groups&ag=lcd1age&a1=0&a2=199>

Image: Ahmad FB, Cisewski JA, Anderson RN. Leading Causes of Death in the US, 2019-2023. JAMA. 2024 Sep 24;332(12):957-958. doi: 10.1001/jama.2024.15563. PMID: 39116093; PMCID: PMC11874302.



Most Common Methods of Death by Suicide, 2024

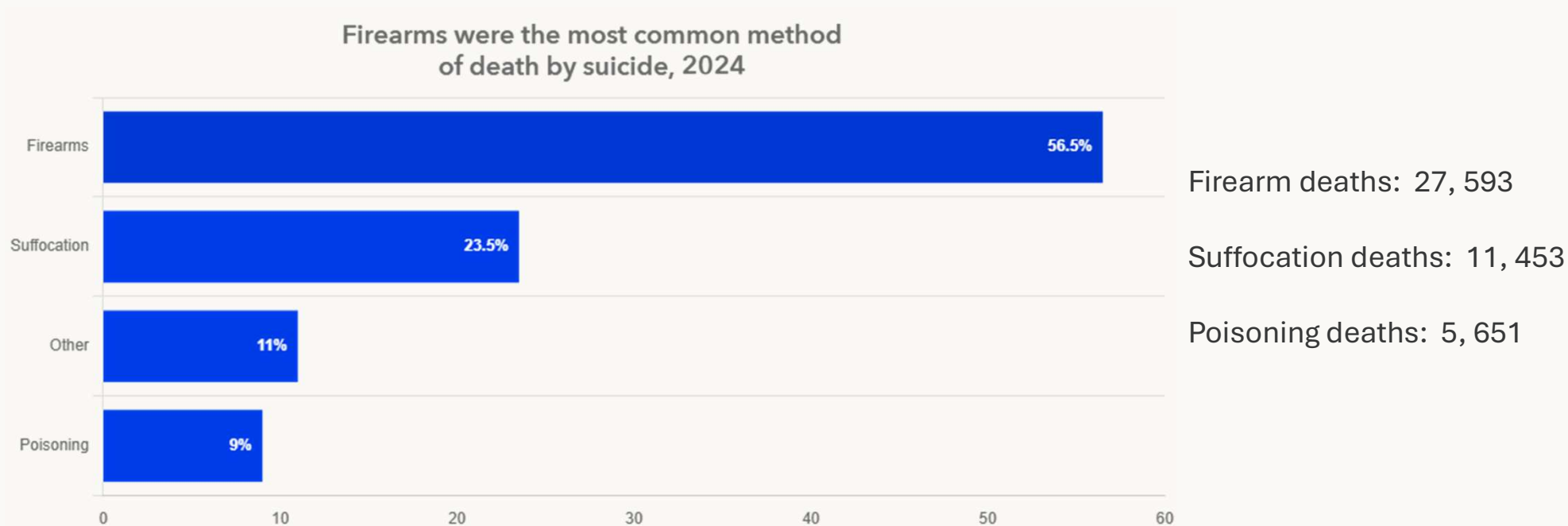


Image: American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. (2026). *Suicide statistics*. <https://afsp.org/suicide-statistics/>

Text: "Suicide and Self-Inflicted Injury." *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, National Center for Health Statistics, 2024, www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/suicide.htm. Accessed 23 Sept. 2026.

Most Common Methods of Non-Fatal Self Harm

1. Poisoning
2. Cutting

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Restricting access to lethal means has the strongest and most consistent evidence for preventing suicide deaths

Mann JJ, Michel CA, Auerbach RP. Improving Suicide Prevention Through Evidence-Based Strategies: A Systematic Review. *Am J Psychiatry*. 2021 Jul;178(7):611-624. doi: 10.1176/appi.ajp.2020.20060864. Epub 2021 Feb 18. PMID: 33596680; PMCID: PMC9092896.



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**Suicide is preventable.
Everyone can help
prevent suicide.**



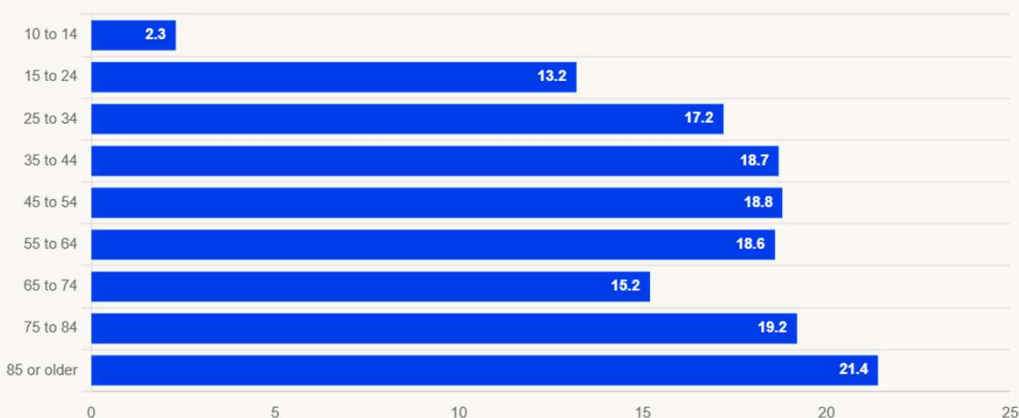


Risk Factors for Suicide

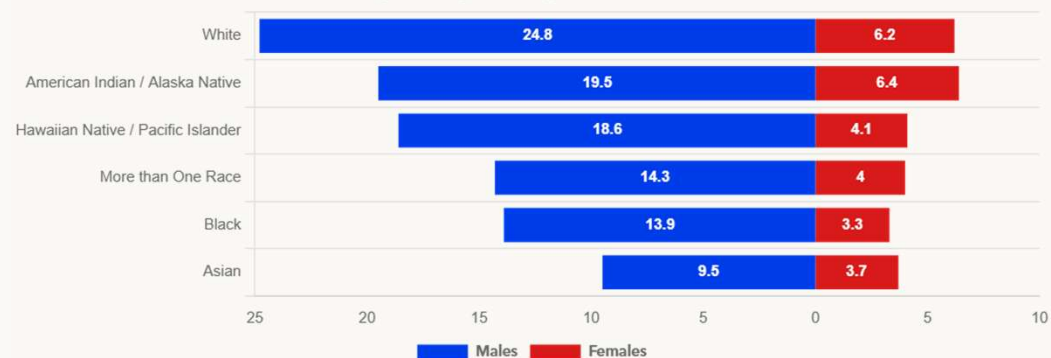
- **Prior history of suicide attempts** (strongest predictor)
- Family history of attempted and completed suicide
- Financial problems
- Chronic medical conditions/chronic pain
- Access to lethal means
- History of mental health problems
- Social isolation
- Death of spouse or loved one
- Loss of independence
- Aging
- Males
- Post-traumatic stress disorder or history of trauma
- Risk factors have limited ability to PREDICT suicide, and this is why it is imperative to identify and intervene early when there are signs of emotional distress and suicidal behaviors

Who is at highest risk?

The suicide rate (per 100,000) for those 85 years or older are the highest followed by those aged 75-84



White, American Indian / Alaska Native, and Hawaiian Native / Pacific Islander groups face disproportionately higher suicide rates (per 100,000) especially among males, 2024



Images: American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. (2026). *Suicide statistics*. <https://afsp.org/suicide-statistics/>

Why are those with older age and medical problems at higher risk?

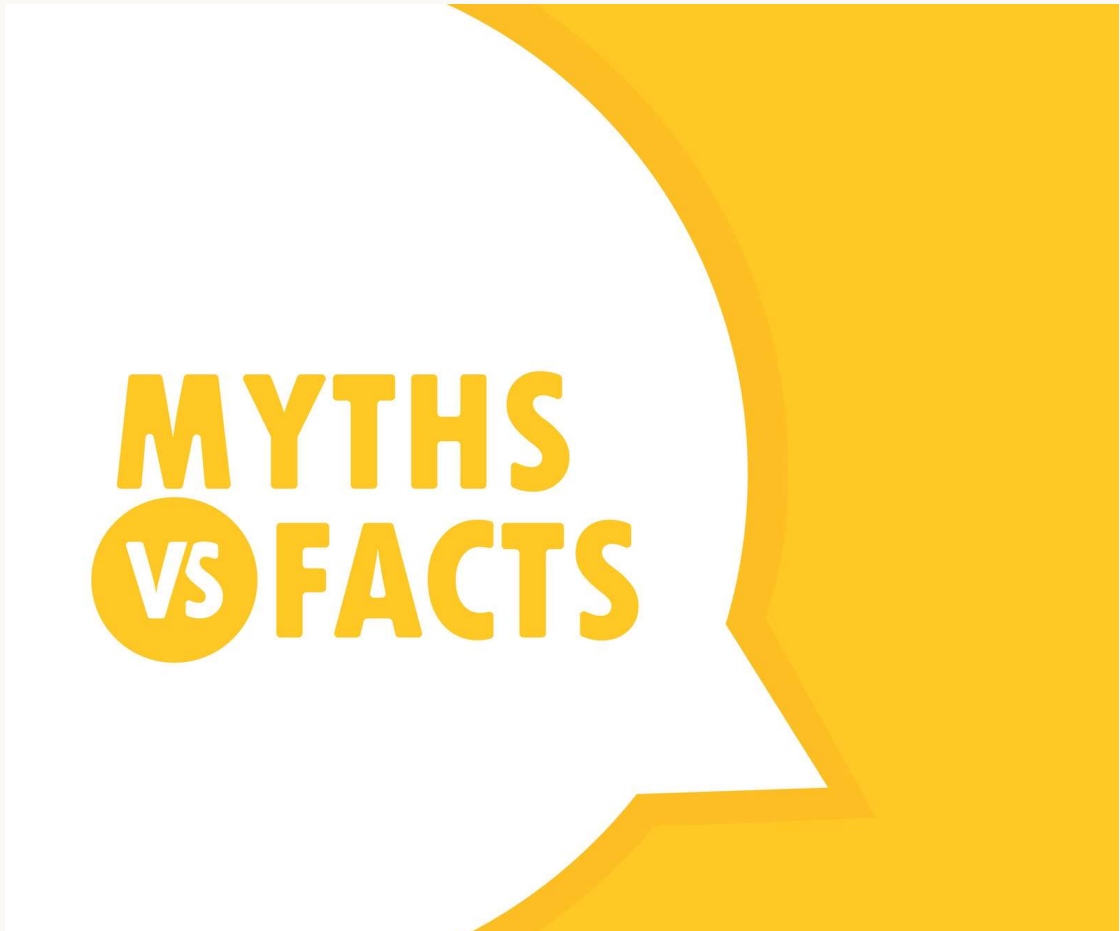
- Multiple physical illnesses
- Frailty and functional decline
- Depression is the single strongest risk factor for late-life suicide ¹
- Feeling like a burden
- Loneliness
- Social isolation
- Grief
- When older adults engage in suicidal behavior, the attempts tend to be less impulsive, more intentional and more lethal ²



1. LeFevre ML; U.S. Preventive Services Task Force. Screening for suicide risk in adolescents, adults, and older adults in primary care: U.S. Preventive Services Task Force recommendation statement. *Ann Intern Med.* 2014 May 20;160(10):719-26. doi: 10.7326/M14-0589. PMID: 24842417.
2. Maynard H, Gregory JD, Davies A, Fox J. Psychological Factors Protecting Against Suicidality in Older Adults: A Systematic Review. *Clin Psychol Psychother.* 2024 Jul-Aug;31(4):e3029. doi: 10.1002/cpp.3029. PMID: 39138589.

Myths regarding suicide

- Asking someone about suicide increases their risk of suicide
- Someone who talks about suicide won't follow through with suicide
- There are no warning signs for suicide
- Only people with a history of psychiatric illness attempt suicide
- People who attempt suicide are just seeking attention
- If someone wants to commit suicide, there is nothing you can do



**MYTHS
VS FACTS**

Protective Factors

- Supportive family and friends
- Religious and spiritual beliefs
- Reasons for living
- Positive coping skills and ways to deal with stress
- Access to health care/good relationship with healthcare team
- Engaging in activities



Signs of emotional distress

- Withdrawing and isolating from friends and family
- No longer finding enjoyment in previously pleasurable activities
- Constantly worrying that something awful may happen
- Engaging in increased usage of alcohol and/or other substances
- Feeling like a burden to others or feeling worthless
- Changes in sleeping or eating habits
- Mood changes, feeling sad most of the time
- Feeling more hopeless about the future
- Distress regarding phase of life changes
- Decline in personal care



How to express concern to someone you feel is in emotional distress?

- Don't be scared to express your concerns.
- Don't delay.
- Listen and be supportive.
- Avoid being judgmental.
- “How are you doing? I have noticed you haven't been quite like yourself lately?”
- “You seem to be going through a lot lately, how are you handling everything?”
- “I am worried about you, let's talk.”



How to help someone in emotional distress?

- Express concern
- Engage them in activities
- Remind them that there is hope and effective treatment for how they feel
- Encourage them to connect with their religion or spiritual beliefs (talk to a member of clergy, chaplain, etc...)
- Encourage them to talk to a health care provider and help them take the first step in connecting to one
- Follow up on the conversation, keep in contact
- Tell them that they are not alone
- Encourage them to take a break from social media
- Provide crisis resources
- Ask them if they are having thoughts of wanting to die or kill themselves
- Offer to accompany them in activities or to appointments to get help

Warning signs of suicide

- Talking about feeling “hopeless” or “not having a reason to live”
- Giving away belongings and/or prized possessions
- Impulsively purchasing a firearm
- Talking about wanting to die or wanting to kill themselves
- Decline in self care
- Preparing for their death
- Making concerning social media posts
- Searching or “Googling” ways to die
- Writing a suicide note
- Cutting off contact with friends and family
- Sometimes there may not be a warning sign but most of the time there IS

How to approach someone who is showing warning signs for suicide?

- Take ALL threats seriously
- Friends and family are usually the first ones to identify changes in behavior and warning signs
- Be supportive
- Don't delay bringing up concerns
- Do NOT promise that you will keep their suicidal thoughts a secret
- Don't be afraid to express your concerns
- Listen without judgement
- Let them talk
- Asking someone about suicide does NOT increase the chance that the person will commit suicide
- Be honest about your concerns
- Be clear and pointed in your questions
- Stay calm
- Don't try to problem solve

How to start the conversation?

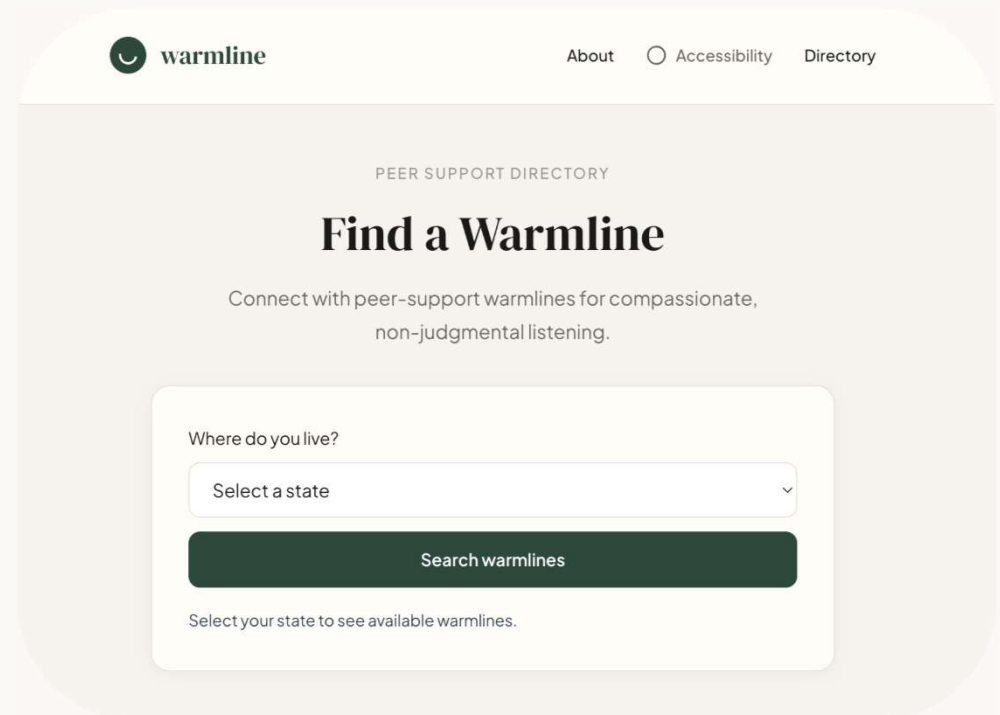
- “I have noticed that you have been acting different lately, are you having any thoughts of wanting to die?”
- “Have you been having any thoughts of wanting to kill yourself?”
- “Do you have any plans or fantasies of how you would kill yourself? If so, I would like to hear about them.”
- “Have you made any plans to prepare to kill yourself and if so, what plans? Do you have access to these means?”
- “Do you intend on following through with the plan to kill yourself?”
- “What do you feel would or could stop you from killing yourself?”
- “Have you tried to kill yourself before and if so, how?”
- “I am concerned that you are having thoughts of wanting to die. Can you tell me more?”



How to get help in a crisis?

Warm lines

- For emotional support
- For low to medium urgency
- Hours of operation vary
- <https://www.warmline.org/>



The screenshot shows the Warmline website's 'Find a Warmline' page. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the Warmline logo (a green circle with a white smiley face) and the word 'warmline' in lowercase. To the right of the logo are links for 'About', 'Accessibility', and 'Directory'. Below the navigation bar, the page is titled 'PEER SUPPORT DIRECTORY' in all caps. The main heading is 'Find a Warmline' in a large, bold, black font. Below this heading is a subtext: 'Connect with peer-support warmlines for compassionate, non-judgmental listening.' The central part of the page features a white search box with a dark green border. Inside the box, the text 'Where do you live?' is followed by a dropdown menu labeled 'Select a state' with a small downward arrow. Below the dropdown is a dark green button with the text 'Search warmlines' in white. At the bottom of the search box, there is a small text prompt: 'Select your state to see available warmlines.'

Hot lines

- For crisis intervention
- For high urgency
- Staffed by trained crisis counselors
- 988 suicide and crisis lifeline
- Can call or text or chat online
- 24 hours
- <https://988lifeline.org/>



Crisis resources

- 911
- Closest emergency room
- Walk-in crisis clinics
(location dependent)
- Mobile crisis teams
(location dependent)



Veterans and Active Duty Military

- 988+ 1
- Text 838255
- 1-800-342-9647
- Chat online
- <https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/>
- <https://www.militaryonesource.mil/>



MILITARY
ONE SOURCE

If there is a concern for
imminent risk of suicide,
get help immediately, do not
leave the person alone.

How to prevent and protect against suicide?

- Recognize the warning signs
- Don't delay having a conversation
- Feel comfortable asking about suicide if you are concerned
- Educate yourself
- De-stigmatize getting help for mental health problems

Additional resources

- Suicide Prevention Resource Center
<https://sprc.org/>
- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
<https://afsp.org/>
- National Alliance for Mental Illness
<https://www.nami.org/>



Questions?