

Suicide Prevention

Almost 550 New Zealanders deliberately kill themselves each year. Far, far greater numbers present to their GP, mental health professionals or emergency services with thoughts of suicide or a recent attempt or act of self harm. And numbers are increasing.

Attempts at suicide are more likely among people with severe mental illness but sometimes people with no previous history of a mental illness, do so, - seemingly 'out of the blue'. Impulsivity, and the influence of alcohol and/or other drugs may lead some to misinterpret the seriousness of a recent stressful event, and feeling hopeless, try to end their life. Sadly, some succeed and die.

Suicide prevention is about how we as individuals and communities can learn specific skills that may help a person regain hope and desire to live. It is about encouraging and supporting that person until they get professional help.

So – what can we do?

Here are a few suggestions for supporting someone expressing suicidal thoughts:

- Take them seriously, believe them and respect their thoughts.
- Encourage them to talk honestly about how they think and feel.
- Don't worry. Talking about suicide with the person won't make the situation worse.
- The person may be feeling intense anger, grief, guilt or distress – so it may be uncomfortable to listen to. You will need to be willing to listen without judging them for their words or deeds.
- Tell them you know their thoughts and feelings are real.
- Reassure them that they are not being a nuisance or burden to you and that you are glad that they have told you how they feel and what they are thinking.
- If you have concerns for their safety – seek help immediately from their or your GP, from the Mental Health Services Crisis Team – Phone 753-6139 or even dial 111 if you feel it is an emergency.
- Understand that the person may not wish to talk to you. Offer to help them find someone else to talk to.
- At all times, try to keep calm and keep them and yourself as safe as possible.
- Continue to show your care, concern and support until the crisis is no longer a crisis.

Just as there are things to do – so there are things not to. Please don't:

- Judge them for their thoughts or deeds – or make them feel guilty for feeling as they do.
- Ignore or minimise their concerns – for to them they will be very real.
- Laugh at, attempt to shame, or get angry with the person
- Tell them to 'snap out of it'.
- Dare them to do it.
- Leave them alone or without support.

Good mental health care and mental health promotion can reduce the risk of suicide in Taranaki but no-one can do more than the person prepared to listen, help and support a person to change their minds and actions and, again, want to live.

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