

My Friend Threatened Suicide – Now what?

My friend has really been through a lot in the past year. One night he told me that he's thought about just ending it all. I didn't really know what to say. I figured he was just having a bad day. I know he's probably depressed, but I could never imagine him considering suicide. How can I help him?

I'm always saddened when I hear of someone who feels like death is more appealing than life. From the comments your friend has made, you are founded in your concern for him. First of all, you can help by being real and having support people for yourself, people whom you trust and with whom you can share your feelings. Then commit yourself to being a friend; someone who will care, listen and provide support.

Don't be afraid to ask questions that naturally come to mind. You are helping by just being there and reminding your friend that you care. Giving advice is unnecessary. You don't have to be his counselor, just his friend. By spending four to eight minute with someone who is suicidal and showing him you care, nine out of ten suicide attempts can be stopped!

Here's some practical things you can do...

- Pray for your friend.
- Listen more than you talk.
- Show concern and interest.
- Talk openly and frankly, and ask, "Are you thinking about suicide?"
- Share your own hurts and experiences.
- Stick with your friend through this difficult time; encourage activities by inviting him places, spend time with him.
- Ask questions to get him to tell you his feelings.
- Keep your friend away from alcohol and drugs.
- Encourage your friend to talk with a youth pastor, counselor or trusted adult.
- Get help from parents, school counselors, crisis intervention agencies, pastors, teachers, hospitals or doctors.

What not to do...

- Do not minimize your friend's situation or belittle his feelings.
- Do not debate.
- Do not leave a person with means (pills, gun, etc.).
- Do not be sworn to secrecy.
- Do not tell him it's dumb or stupid.
- Do not agree with hopelessness.
- Do not try to handle it alone.
- Do not leave if you think an attempt is going to happen.
- Do not challenge your friend by saying, "Go ahead, do it."

There are many clues to look for in someone who is considering suicide, and it looks like your friend has already displayed some of these...

- Talking about suicide – verbal clues and hints
- Statements of hopelessness and worthlessness
- Radical personality changes
- Isolation
- Changes in eating and sleeping patterns
- Lack of concern for appearance
- Declining grades, reckless behavior, drug and alcohol abuse, running away, etc.
- Loss of interest in previously important things
- Giving valuable possessions away

These are just practical things you can do to help. But the most important thing is committing yourself to be a friend, someone who will care. Again, don't feel pressured to handle this on your own or feel like you're betraying your friend by seeking advice. Get additional help.

Articles are written by Bob Lenz, Tiffany Thompson and other national youth communicators with Life Promotions Inc., a non-profit youth organization committed to instilling hope, worth and value in youth.