

SUICIDE PREVENTION

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“Opportunity is always present
in the midst of crisis.”



The Chinese word for crisis carries symbols for two different elements, danger and opportunity. What can we learn from this timeless wisdom? No matter the difficulty of the circumstances, no matter how dangerous the situation, at the heart of each crisis lies a tremendous opportunity. Today's column will feature information about suicide, a potentially dangerous problem that can, when the appropriate resources are activated, also be an opportunity for growth.

As the fog of midterms begins to lift, some of you are probably feeling better, lighter, happier than before. But for many students, college is not an entirely joyful experience and the transition from childhood to adulthood is fraught with barriers, obstacles, and rocky terrain. There is good news and bad news about this fact. First, the bad news: A significant minority of students (10-15%) have suicidal thoughts at some point during their college careers. According to the U.S. National Center for Health Statistics (1999), one young person (15-24 years) kills themselves, on average, every 2 hours and 15 minutes. For college-age people, suicide rates are now at 10.3 (per 100,000), down from 13.2 in 1990. BUT suicide is still the 2nd leading cause of death in college students (after accidents)!

The good news is that valuable resources are available all across campus and whether you are having suicidal thoughts yourself or know of someone who is, you can do something to help. Critical resources include family, friends,

HAs, Residential Life and Dean's Staff, Campus Police, Student Health Services, and, of course, Psychological and Counseling Services.

How do you know when to take a friend's suicidal musings seriously? The short answer is ALWAYS – if you hear someone talking about suicide, even in a seemingly light or joking manner, it is an excellent idea to consult with a staff member and help the student activate essential campus resources. When is the situation a dire emergency? If the person has multiple risk factors for suicide and/or they discuss a specific plan of how to carry it out, they may be in imminent danger – especially if they also have the means at their disposal to carry out their plans (e.g., pills, weapons, rope). In these emergency situations, the safest thing to do is CALL Counseling and Psychological Services at 858-534-3755 or CAMPUS POLICE at 858-534-HELP. Here are some key risk factors to look for in a potentially suicidal student:

COLLEGE STUDENT RISK FACTORS (a helpful mnemonic)

- S social support network is poor (few friends, family, etc.)
- A alcohol or drugs (implicated in ~50% of suicides)
- D depression
- S stressor, e.g., recent loss/breakup/illness
- T thought process (e.g., disordered thinking, not making sense)
- U upset, angry, hostile, impulsive personality
- D demographics (e.g., living alone, with abusive partner, etc.)
- E events surrounding evaluation (what led them to you today?)
- N no hope (e.g., giving away possessions)
- T tried before (i.e., personal history of suicide attempt)

An important thing to remember about suicide is that it is a final solution to a temporary problem and that the psychological disorders underlying suicidal thoughts can usually be treated successfully. A superb reference and self-help book for suicidal students or their friends and family is Choosing to Live: How to Defeat Suicide Through Cognitive Therapy by Ellis and Newman, available at your local bookstore or Amazon for about \$14. Suicide can certainly be devastating to the student-victim, their family, and to the campus community – but it can also be an important opportunity for us to help them successfully navigate the rocky road of college life.

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counseling and
psychological services

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