

# Suicide:

## Questions Most Frequently Asked



**"Why do people kill themselves?"**

**Fact:** Most of the time people who kill themselves have a mental illness, which occurs when the chemicals in a person's brain get out of balance or become disrupted in some way. Healthy people do not kill themselves. A person who has depression does not think like a typical person who is feeling good. Their illness prevents them from being able to look forward to anything. They can only think about NOW and have lost the ability to imagine into the future. Many times they don't realize they are suffering from a treatable illness and they feel they can't be helped. Seeking help may not even enter their minds. They cannot think of their family or friends, because of their illness. They are consumed with emotional and, many times, physical pain that becomes unbearable. They don't see any way out. They feel hopeless and helpless. They don't want to die, but it's the only way they feel their pain will end. It is a non-rational act. Getting depression is involuntary - no one asks for it, just like people don't ask to get cancer or diabetes. But, we do know that depression is a treatable illness; that people can feel good again.

Depression, plus alcohol or drug use can be lethal. Many times people will try to alleviate the symptoms of their illness by drinking or using drugs. Alcohol and/or drugs will make the disease worse! There is an increased risk for suicide because alcohol and drugs decrease judgement and increase impulsivity.

**"Do people who attempt suicide do it to prove something? To show people how bad they feel and to get sympathy?"**

**Fact:** They don't do it necessarily to prove something, but it is certainly a cry for help, which should never be ignored. This is a warning to people that something is terribly wrong. Many times people cannot express how horrible or desperate they're feeling - they simply cannot put their pain into words. There is no way to describe it. A suicide attempt must always be taken seriously. The people who have attempted suicide in the past may be at risk for trying it again and possibly completing it, if they don't get help for their depression.

**"Can suicidal persons mask their depression by appearing to be happy?"**

**Fact:** We know that many people suffering from depression can hide their feelings, appearing to be happy. But, can a person who is contemplating suicide feign happiness? Yes, they can. But, most of the time, a suicidal person will give clues as to how desperate he or she is feeling. They may be subtle clues though and that's why knowing what to watch for is critical. A person may "hint" that he or she is thinking about suicide. They may say something like, "Everyone would be better off without me." Or, "It doesn't matter. I won't be around much longer anyway." We need to "key into" phrases like those instead of dismissing them as just talk. It is estimated that 80% of people who died of suicide mentioned it to a friend or relative before dying. Other danger signs are having a preoccupation with death, losing interest in things one cares about, giving things away, having a lot of "accidents" recently or engaging in risk-taking behavior, like speeding or reckless driving or general carelessness. Some people even joke about completing suicide - it should always be taken seriously.

**"Is it more likely for a person to suicide if he or she has been exposed to it in their family or has had a close friend die of suicide?"**

**Fact:** Depression and other related depressive illnesses have a genetic component. When these illnesses are left untreated (or mistreated) suicide can be the result. But talking about suicide or being aware of a suicide that happened in your family or to a close friend does not put you at risk for attempting it, if you are healthy. The only people who are at risk are those who are vulnerable in the first place - vulnerable because of an illness called depression or one of the other depressive illnesses. The risk increases if the illness is not treated. It's important to remember that not all people who have depression have suicidal thoughts - only some.

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