

## **The American Counseling Association's "*Counseling Corner*" Weekly Columns**

### **Does Someone You Know Seem Suicidal?**

from the American Counseling Association

Homicides are the centerpiece of any number of TV shows. Media stories often spotlight killings that occur around the country. And yet there is a much more common cause of death that receives relatively little publicity - suicide.

Suicide is actually the 10th most common cause of death in the U.S. (homicides rank number 17). For young people ages 15 to 24, it actually is the second leading cause of death.

Yet most of us are unaware of the signs to look for when someone close to us may be contemplating suicide. That's especially important because many suicides can be prevented.

Depression, of course, is an enormous factor among those contemplating suicide. Someone who constantly seems depressed, or who has turned to excessive use of drugs or alcohol as a means for escaping his or her depression, often is at high risk for suicide.

Experts tell us, however, that most people who are thinking about suicide don't really want to kill themselves, but rather are looking for help to get them out of the fear and pain they are experiencing. One message from such findings is that it's okay to ask someone if he or she is feeling suicidal. There's no evidence that doing so will increase the risk of suicide, and may actually help reduce it. Asking this question can make the person feel less anxious, and may lead to a discussion of the problems and depression the person is feeling.

It may also open the opportunity for getting the professional counseling help that can assist the person in facing and learning to handle their situation. Counselors today can offer therapy and antidepressants that can be very effective in suicide prevention.

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (1-800-273-8255) is available 24/7 to link a caller with a qualified, trained counselor who can help people with substance abuse, economic worries, relationship and family problems, depression, mental or physical illness and any of the many other causes of severe depression.

The main message is that help is available. If someone close to you seems suicidal, talk to him or her and try to offer help and support, while also urging them to contact a professional counselor. And if you, yourself, are feeling overwhelmed, pick up the phone and call that toll free number above.

*"Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association.  
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