Threat to Self:
Suicide &
Self-Injurious Behavior

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What do you do?

- You check your e-mail and find a message from a student, apparently sent about 3 a.m., stating that he is feeling overwhelmed and frustrated and doesn’t know “if it’s worth it anymore.” You had noticed some changes in him the past few weeks and heard that his girlfriend had broken up with him. You had started to wonder if he might be a little depressed.

- What do you do?
Suicide

• “Suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem.”

• “Suicide is a fundamental human right. This does not mean that it is morally desirable. It only means that society does not have the moral right to interfere.” —Thomas Szasz
Suicide

• “The real reason for not committing suicide is because you always know how swell life gets again after the hell is over.” — Ernest Hemingway

• “More than one soul dies in a suicide.”
Suicidal Behavior

- Suicidal behavior exists along a continuum from:
  - Thinking about ending one’s life ("suicidal ideation")
  - To developing a plan
  - To non-fatal suicidal behavior ("suicide attempt")
  - To ending one’s life ("suicide")
Suicidal Behavior

• **Suicidal ideation**
  - “Thoughts of harming or killing oneself.” The severity of suicidal ideation can be determined by assessing the frequency, intensity and duration of these thoughts (IOM 2002).
  - 54% of UNI students surveyed said they have had suicidal thoughts
  - 10% of college students have thought of a plan for suicide
    - “All healthy men have thought of their own suicide.” - Albert Camus
    - “The thought of suicide is a powerful solace: by means of it one gets through many a bad night.” - Nietzsche
Suicidal Behavior

• Suicide attempt
  • “A non-fatal, self-inflicted destructive act with explicit or inferred intent to die” (IOM 2002).
    • Women attempt twice as much as men
    • 25 suicide attempts for every completed suicide
    • For college students, 100-200 attempts per completion
    • 5% of UNI students reported at least one suicide attempt.
    • 12% of UNI Counseling Center clients reported previous suicide attempts.
Suicidal Behavior

• Suicide
  • “Fatal self-inflicted destructive act with explicit or inferred intent to die” (IOM 2002).
    • 11th leading cause of death in U.S.
    • Third leading cause for young people.
    • Males commit suicide four times more than females.
    • Highest rates for elderly males.
How Many Suicides?

• Annually:
  • 1,000,000 suicides in the world
  • 32,000 suicides in the U.S.
    • 89 suicides per day
    • One every 16 minutes
  • 343 suicides in Iowa
    • About 11.6 per 100,000 residents
    • 27th in nation
  • 1100 college students in US die from suicide
    • About 7.5 per 100,000.
Suicide & College Students

- 42% felt too depressed to function
- 33% felt hopeless
- 10% have been diagnosed with depression
- 10% have seriously contemplated suicide
- 8% have made a plan
- 1.5% have attempted suicide
- 1,100 complete suicide
Scenario 2

• When a resident assistant walks into a restroom, she sees one of the residents washing blood off of her forearm and applying bandages. When asked what happened, the resident says “it’s no big deal” and that she doesn’t want to talk about it. The RA knows the student has been under a lot stress lately because of family issues and problems in a couple of her classes.

• What would you do if you were the RA?
Self-Injurious Behavior

• Cutting, burning, scratching to inflict physical pain or injury with the intent of relieving emotional pain.
• Estimated 1.5 to 2% of population.
• About 20% of Counseling Center clients have had some history of this behavior.
Suicide vs. SIB

- Intention to die?
- Relief of pain?
- Coping with life or ending life?
- Other history?
Risk Factors for Suicide

- Previous attempts
- Mental disorders, especially depression
- Family history of suicide
- Alcohol or substance abuse
- Impulsiveness
- Hopelessness
- Illness or loss
- Isolation
- Cultural or religious beliefs
- Local epidemics of suicide
- Unwillingness to seek help
- Access to lethal methods
Protective Factors for Suicide

- Effective treatment for mental, physical, and substance abuse problems.
- Family and community support.
- Support from ongoing medical and mental health care relationships.
- Skills in problem solving, conflict resolution and non-violent ways of handling disputes.
- Cultural and religious beliefs.
Warning Signs for Suicide

• Seek immediate help from a mental health provider or call 911 when you see:
  • Threatening or talking about killing self.
  • Looking for ways to kill self; e.g., seeking firearms or pills.
  • Giving away possessions, “tying up loose ends.”
  • Talking or writing about death, dying or suicide when these actions are out of the ordinary for the person.
Warning Signs for Suicide

• Seek help by contacting a mental health professional or calling a suicide crisis line:
  • Hopelessness
  • Feeling trapped—like there’s no way out
  • Increased alcohol or drug use
  • Withdrawal from friends, family and society
  • Anxiety, agitation, sleep disturbances
  • Rage, uncontrolled anger
  • Dramatic mood changes
  • No reason for living
Be Aware of Depression

- Sadness or empty feelings
- Loss interest in pleasurable activities
- Appetite and weight changes
- Sleep problems
- Irritability
- Fatigue and loss of energy
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness and helplessness
- Hopelessness and pessimism
- Difficulty with concentration, memory and motivation
- Thoughts of death or suicide
Scenario

• You check your e-mail and find a message from a student, apparently sent about 3 a.m., stating that he is feeling overwhelmed and frustrated and doesn’t know “if it’s worth it anymore.” You had noticed some changes in him the past few weeks and heard that his girlfriend had broken up with him. You had started to wonder if he might be a little depressed.

• What do you do?
What do you do?

- E-mail him back expressing your concern and suggesting he contact the Counseling Center.
- Call him or talk to him in person to express your concern.
- Forward the e-mail to Public Safety or the Dean of Students asking them to check on his welfare.
- Other ideas?
Helpful Interventions

• QPR
  • Question
  • Persuade
  • Refer

• ACT
  • Acknowledge
  • Care
  • Tell a professional

• TLC
  • Take it seriously
  • Listen
  • Contact help

• AID
  • Ask about suicide
  • Intervene
  • Don’t keep it a secret
Suicide prevention at UNI
BE AWARE
BE DIRECT
TAKE ACTION
GET HELP
273-2676 • SHC 103
Foundation 2 Crisis Line: 800-332-4224
www.uni.edu/counseling
Information Resources

- UNI Counseling Center
- www.uni.edu/counseling
- Jed Foundation
- www.jedfoundation.org
- America Foundation for Suicide Prevention
  - www.afsp.org
- Centers for Disease Control
  - www.cdc.gov
- American Association of Suicidology
  - www.suicidology.org