



## University Counseling Center The George Washington University

2033 K Street, NW, Suite 330 \* 202.994.5300 \* <http://gwired.gwu.edu/counsel>

**Suicide.** College students typically encounter a great deal of stress during their university years. The task of balancing academics, work, relationships, friendships, and extracurricular activities can be difficult.

While most students cope successfully with the demands of college life, for some the pressures may be overwhelming and unmanageable. Students may feel alone, isolated, helpless, and even hopeless. Unfortunately, for these students, suicide might seem like the only way to end their daily suffering.

### Warning Signs That Someone May Be Considering Suicide

While these warning signs do not mean that someone will to commit suicide, they should be taken seriously – it is always better to be overly concerned than to ignore another's cry for help.

- Talking directly or indirectly about committing suicide or wanting to die
- They have a suicide plan – the more specific the plan, the more serious the threat
- Suffering from serious depression
- Experiencing from marked changes in academic and/or job performance or behavior
- Engaging in other actions that could potentially cause harm to self, including
  - Taking too many pills
  - Purposely injuring one's self (such as cutting or burning)
  - Taking unnecessary or life-threatening risks (e.g., driving recklessly, drinking and driving, walking alone at night)
- Reporting a history of suicide attempts or gestures
- Saying goodbye to friends or giving away prized possessions
- Shifting from serious depression to sudden happiness – this might be a sign of deciding to “take care of problems” by committing suicide



**If you identify with some of the symptoms described here, or if you think a friend might be exhibiting these signs, please call the UCC (202.994.5300) 24/7 to speak with a counselor or to set up an appointment with a counselor.**

### Symptoms of Serious Depression

- A persistently sad, anxious, or “empty” mood
- Feelings of hopelessness and helplessness
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, or pessimism
- Loss of interest or pleasure in previously-enjoyed hobbies or activities
- Insomnia, early-morning awakening, or oversleeping
- Overeating or weight gain
- Decreased energy, fatigue, or feeling “slowed down”
- Decreased appetite or weight loss
- Thoughts of death or suicide
- Restlessness or irritability
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions

## Factors that Increase Suicide Risk

- Death of a loved one
- Loss of health or recent injury
- Relationship break-up
- Loss of job/status/prestige
- Death (by suicide) of someone close
- Extreme anxiety, agitation, or enraged behavior
- Severe insomnia
- Increased alcohol and/or drug use
- Feelings of hopeless and desperation
- History of depressed moods or suicidal feelings

## How to Talk to a Friend

Most people are likely to feel helpless and overwhelmed upon encountering someone who is suicidal. The following guidelines may provide direction for the helping process. However, you should never deal with a suicidal person alone. Always reach out for assistance.

- **Listen.** We often undervalue the power of active listening. Help the individual feel understood by rephrasing words and feelings. For example, "It seems like you are feeling/saying..."
- **Be supportive:** Show that you care by telling them, "I care about you," "You are important to me," and "I'd like to find a way to help." Convey the message that suicidal feelings are temporary, that depression can be treated, and that problems can be solved.
- **Do not judge, lecture, or argue about the moral issues regarding suicide:** Avoid the temptation to say, "You have so much to live for," or "Suicide will hurt your family."
- **Talk openly about what you observe in your friend's condition.** For example, "You seem really down lately; is something bothering you?"
- **Be direct when addressing suicidal intentions:** Ask, "Are you thinking about suicide?" If the person is suicidal, such a question can be a relief as s/he may actually welcome the chance to express painful feelings. If the person is not suicidal, you have expressed care and concern.
- **Evaluate the immediate risk:** If the person is experiencing suicidal thoughts, ask specific and direct questions about immediate risk:
  - The presence of a suicide plan (e.g., "Do you have a plan or an idea of how you might end your life?")
  - Possession of means for suicide (e.g., "Do you have access to means, such as pills, knife, gun, nearby bridge or high place?")
  - Plans for a date (e.g., "Do you have a time or date in mind?")
- **Never leave a person alone who has secured a means for suicide.** However, protect yourself. If the person is armed, leave the premises and call the police.
- **Reach out to others.** Do not allow yourself to be the only one helping a suicidal person. Recognize the limits of your expertise and responsibility. Share your concerns with others, particularly a mental health professional. Do not be bound by secrecy.
- **Encourage the person to seek professional help immediately.** Individuals contemplating suicide often believe they cannot be helped. You can help with the first step by sitting with them while they call a counselor, or by accompanying them to a counselor's office or the emergency room.



## Campus Crisis and Emergency Resources

**In a life-threatening or extreme emergency,  
immediately call the University Police Department (UPD) at 202.994.6111  
or proceed to the nearest hospital emergency room.  
GWU Hospital: 900 23<sup>rd</sup> ST NW – Foggy Bottom metro stop**

**Urgent Need to Reach a Counselor:** Call the UCC 24/7. Just dial **202.994.5300**.

**Sexual Assault Crisis Consultation (SACC):** SACC team members are professional staff members at GW trained to assist survivors of sexual assault or rape. The SACC team is available 24/7 at 202.994.SACC (7222).

### Community Hotlines:

CrisisLink (local hotline): 703.527.4077

DC Access Helpline: 888.7WE.HELP (793.4357)

DC Rape Crisis Center: 202.333.RAPE (7273)

Domestic Violence Hotline: 202.347.2777

National Lifeline: 800.273.TALK (8255)