

WARNING SIGNS OF SUICIDE

As a counsellor, my most difficult challenge is working with clients who are grieving the loss of a family member or friend who has died as a result of suicide. Many times, I have heard individuals beg the question “Why?” followed with, “I didn’t see it coming. “If I only had known I could have stopped them.” Their journey of grief is riddled with unknowns fueled by guilt.

The sad reality is there isn’t really any typical pattern of behavior for someone who is suicidal. However, there are **common warning signs**. You may see one or more of these in someone contemplating suicide.

These are the signs that are generally clear and easy to observe:

- Talking about dying or wanting to die, feeling empty, hopeless, not having a reason to live, that others would be better off without them, or having no way out of problems.
- Mentioning strong feelings of guilt and shame.
- Social withdrawal and isolation.
- Giving away personal items and wrapping up loose ends.
- Saying goodbye to friends and family.

Unfortunately, there are also **easy to miss warning signs** of suicide. Even people close to the person feeling suicidal may not realize how deeply hopeless they feel. Here are five signs you need to know about that could indicate someone is thinking about suicide:

1. **Any unusual changes in behavior.** This is common for someone who is suicidal, but it’s easy to overlook because the changes may not seem related to depression or hopelessness. For instance, someone you know who is kind may become angry and aggressive. Or someone who has been sad and struggling with depression may suddenly become calm and seemingly happy.
2. **Changes in sleeping patterns.** Someone who is feeling suicidal may sleep more than normal, struggling to get out of bed at all. They may sleepless, experiencing insomnia and staying up until all hours and then struggling the next day from fatigue. Whether it’s a symptom of being suicidal or not, these kinds of changes in sleeping habits are cause for concern and should be addressed.
3. **Accessing/Gathering a lethal means.** Gathering lethal means is also an important warning sign that can be hidden. Someone may start stockpiling pills or purchase a firearm without anyone noticing. They are easy to hide. It’s important to be aware of any lethal means someone you are concerned about may have access to. With access the risk of suicide goes up.
4. **Emotional distance.** Someone who is feeling suicidal may become emotionally detached from life in general, from other people, and from typical activities (i.e. work, hobbies, favorite past times). It is important to note this kind of behavior and recognize it as a potential warning sign or a symptom of depression.
5. **Physical pain.** Physical pain and discomfort are often overlooked as symptoms of depression and also of suicide. If someone you know complains often of any type of pain, like headaches, digestive upset, or just general body pain, be alert to other signs of depression or suicide.

It is extremely important to remember that all signs (common & easy to miss) should be taken seriously.

FCSS offers workshops as well as individual counselling to help you learn more.
For more information call 587-370-3728 or email counsellingservices@fcss.ca.
Visit www.fcss.ca for more information.

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