

HEALTH MATTERS

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Are suicidal thoughts common?

OUR EXPERTS ANSWER YOUR QUESTIONS

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Suicide refers to a death caused by someone injuring themselves with the intent to die. And it's occurring at an alarming rate in the U.S. Among Americans aged 10 to 34, suicide is the second leading cause of death among those aged 35-44 and the fifth cause of death among those aged 45-55. What triggers thoughts of suicide?

Suzie Marriott: Sadly, many of us, in fact, six million Americans, have had thoughts of taking our lives. Half of those made a plan and 1.4 million took some action toward ending their lives.

Some contributing factors include:

- Loss of a loved one (particularly in last two years)
- Legal problems or a previous criminal record
- Being a victim of abuse
- Relationship problems
- Financial stress or job loss
- Depression, anxiety or other emotional problems
- History of self-harm and/or previous suicide attempts
- Exposure to suicidal behaviors
- Feelings of isolation

Who is most at risk?

Dr. Mahaffey: Some people are more impacted

than others by suicide. These include:

- Veterans and other military personnel
- People in construction, the arts, design, entertainment, sports and media fields
- LGBTQ youth
- White men, 44 to 65 and 85 years and older
- Those diagnosed with major depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, borderline personality disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, substance use and eating disorders

Are there warning signs?

Suzie Marriott: Yes. And sadly, 50 percent of those who die by suicide do so after their first and only attempt. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has identified 12 warning signs of suicide:

1. Feeling like a burden
2. Being isolated
3. Increased anxiety
4. Feeling trapped or in unbearable pain
5. Increased substance use
6. Talking or posting about wanting to die
7. Making plans for suicide
8. Looking for a way to access lethal means
9. Increased anger or rage
10. Extreme mood swings
11. Expressing hopelessness
12. Sleeping too little or too much

What can I do to help someone I know?

Suzie Marriott: If you notice any warning signs in someone you know, you should do the following:

1. Ask clearly and directly about suicide.
2. Keep them safe.
3. Be physically present if possible or show

support by listening on the phone. Don't leave them alone.

4. If you think they might quickly act upon their suicidal thoughts, help them connect to the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline.
5. Follow up after you've connected them with the immediate support systems. This will help them build self-worth and feel valued. For further information about ways you can help, visit bethe1to.com.

What is Stony Brook's approach?

Dr. Mahaffey: Our team of suicide prevention experts know how to put someone at ease to open up while being supportive and respectful. We can diagnose and treat underlying depression, anxiety or other emotional problems in person or from the comfort and privacy of a person's home, via telehealth. And for those people diagnosed with borderline personality disorder, who've tried countless treatments and still feel like life is crushing down on them, we offer Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT). This science-backed therapy takes a holistic approach to helping people develop a life that's less painful and really worth living. It focuses on finding balance and getting unstuck from extremes by learning emotional life skills and making sustainable changes in your daily life so you can move forward in a healthy way and enjoy life.

For an appointment with one of our Stony Brook suicide prevention experts, call (631) 632-2428 (CHAT). Or call the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline.

Visit elih.stonybrookmedicine.edu for more on Stony Brook Eastern Long Island Hospital.