

Suicide Prevention in the Workplace:

Noticing and responding to coworkers in distress

Suicide is a leading cause of death among working aged individuals. It is estimated that one person dies by suicide every 11 minutes. Research shows one of the most effective ways to prevent suicide is to increase awareness of warning signs and to reach out.

We can all play a role in suicide prevention. We ALL have the ability to save a life if we know what signs to look for and how to connect those we are concerned about with resources and support.

Before You Take Action

Know your company's protocol for what to do if an employee is in distress or is suicidal and consider how you would follow procedures given your work environment (e.g., in-person, remote). If you're unsure, talk with your Human Resources or Employee Relations departments to learn more about relevant workplace policies and protocol.

Warning Signs That Require Immediate Attention

Signs that require immediate attention include thoughts, statements or behaviors that indicate someone is at high risk for self-injury:

- **Statements of hopelessness:** "I feel like there's no way out."
- **Saying there is no reason to live:** "I just have nothing left at this point."
- **Statements about hurting or killing oneself:** "I feel ready to end it all."
- **Looking for ways to harm or kill oneself:** e.g. collecting pills, buying a weapon
- **Other signs not specific to suicide that may warrant concern:** Giving away important possessions, getting affairs in order (e.g., writing will)

How to Respond

- 1 If a co-worker is exhibiting warning signs that require immediate attention:
Confirm their location if person is working remotely.
- 2 Ask the person directly if they are having thoughts of suicide using a calm, non-judgmental tone: “Sometimes when people are hurting or are feeling overwhelmed, they have thoughts of killing themselves. Are you having thoughts like that?”

If the answer is...

NO →

Talk to them about getting help. (e.g., “Our mental health benefit, Lyra Health, makes it easy to quickly access high quality confidential care. We could call them together or take a look at their website”).

Consult with Human Resources as needed.

VAGUE →

Take it as a “yes” until you’re able to clarify.

YES →

Gather information about imminent risk.

Imminent risk means a person has a plan for how they will harm themselves and intention to use that plan.

Have you thought about how you would kill yourself?

Have you decided when you would do it?

Do you have access to [stated method]?

Remember, research shows that asking these questions does not increase the likelihood of someone attempting suicide, and in fact, it may save a life.

**If the person seems to be
at IMMINENT risk for harm:**

**Call emergency
personnel**
(e.g., 911 in the U.S.) and/or
security.
Don’t leave the individual
alone until they are
connected with
professional help.

**If the person is NOT at
imminent risk for harm:**

**Talk to them about getting
help.** (e.g., “Our mental health
benefit, Lyra Health, makes it
easy to quickly access high
quality confidential care. We
could call them together or take
a look at their website”).
Consult with Human Resources
about what to do next, including
identifying who will stay in
contact with your co-worker.

Other Warning Signs That May Indicate Serious Risk

Be aware of other warning signs that can indicate someone is experiencing emotional distress, which could increase risk for self-harm. These include changes in a person's overall demeanor and functioning, including new or worsening behaviors, particularly those occurring in the context of a challenging life event or change, a painful loss, or prolonged stress. Potential signs include:

Changes in mood	Withdrawal from regular activities	Difficulty concentrating
Persistent irritability, anger, anxiety, or sadness	Withdrawal from relationships	Increased use of substances
Sleeping more or less	Personal neglect	Reckless behavior
Weight gain or loss	Decreased motivation	Statements about feeling trapped or hopeless
Decline in work performance		

How to Respond

If you notice warning signs that may indicate a co-worker is experiencing emotional distress, consider consulting with Human Resources or Employee Relations, checking in with the individual, and connecting them to resources using the following steps:

- **Be direct.** "I notice that you haven't seemed like yourself lately."
- **Describe what you see.** "I notice you haven't been responding to emails and you seem distracted in meetings."
- **Ask open-ended questions.** "How have you been lately?" "Tell me more." Do more listening than talking
- **Validate & reassure help is available.** "I can understand why this feels so difficult. I care about you and want to make sure you get the support you need."
- **Suggest co-worker seek support.** "Have you thought about talking with Human Resources or Employee Relations? They can help connect you to helpful support in this type of situation."
- **Avoid common pitfalls.** Try not to be judgmental, don't try to diagnose, and avoid giving advice or becoming the employee's sole source of support. The goal of this conversation is to convey concern and learn a bit more so that you can connect your co-worker to the appropriate resource.

Remember, if at any point there seems to be risk of imminent harm, call local emergency personnel.