

RECOGNIZING THE WARNING SIGNS



American
Foundation
for Suicide
Prevention

Rafi was always dependable—the one who could fix any problem and make you laugh at lunch. But in recent weeks, things have changed. He started isolating himself from colleagues, avoiding lunch with his crew members, and giving away his tools. He began impulsively rushing through tasks and making small mistakes he never used to make. Some people chalked it up to stress, but one coworker approached Rafi and said, “Hey, something seems off—want to talk?” That question opened a door. It turned out Rafi had been dealing with some tough things at work and home and was feeling overwhelmed and seriously depressed. Recognizing those warning signs gave his team the chance to help before things could have gotten worse.

SUICIDE WARNING SIGNS

Talk: Those who are thinking about suicide often talk about it. It is important to listen for comments like having no reason to live, being burdensome, feeling trapped, or being in unbearable pain. Sometimes people speak about ending their life in a joking manner - take those comments seriously and use them as an opportunity to open a conversation.

Behavior: Look for changes in a person's typical behavior. If you notice someone acting differently than they usually do, speak to the person about what you are noticing. You may see increased alcohol or drug use. They might seem tired from not sleeping well, or start acting recklessly. They might withdraw from activities, or isolate themselves from family and friends. They also might look for a way to kill themselves, such as searching online for methods, or. They may give away possessions or exhibit reckless spending.

Mood: Pay attention to changes in mood. This includes: depression, anxiety, apathy, anger outbursts, irritability, impulsivity, or humiliation. We all have ups and downs, but when you notice a change that seems uncharacteristic or concerning, it is important to speak to the person about what you are noticing.

JOB SITE DISCUSSION STARTERS

1. It might not feel natural for everyone to say, “you want to talk?”. If you observe warning signs of suicide in someone, what questions would you ask to check in with them?
2. We don't have to be experts, so if you think someone might be struggling, what words or questions would you use to encourage them to call or text 988?

THE BOTTOM LINE

People rarely ask for help in obvious ways.^{vi} That's why it's important to pay attention to listen for cues, or subtle shifts in behavior or mood. Catching these signs early can be the key to preventing a crisis. Your willingness to notice—and to say something—can make a real difference. Having a conversation could save a life.

Don't forget to mention your company's mental health resources or local service options.

^{vi} Henderson C, Evans-Lacko S, Thornicroft G. Mental illness stigma, help seeking, and public health programs. Am J Public Health. 2013 May;103(5):777-80. doi: 10.2105/AJPH.2012.301056. Epub 2013 Mar 14. PMID: 23488489; PMCID: PMC3698814. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC3698814/>