

## Family Counseling Service: What Would You Do if You Thought a Friend was Suicidal?

By Larry Deavers and April Stevens

With so many high-profile suicides in the headlines lately, it has reminded all of us that you can never just assume someone is okay by the way they appear at work, at a family or church event, or even on television. Often, the most difficult struggles we have are the ones that we hold in secret and do our best to keep others from ever knowing. The problem with those secret battles is that we become convinced that no one else is having the same problems we are. Then, we convince ourselves that there is no way of escape. More than anything else, it's that feeling of being trapped that feels overwhelming. That's when some people start looking at suicide as a viable option.

It's not uncommon for people to think about suicide at some point, but for most, they realize that suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary crisis. Those who follow through with a suicide attempt are the ones who see their situation as inescapable or unbearable. They may experience ongoing pain, loss, fear, or depression that they just don't see how they will ever overcome.

So, what are the warning signs that may tell you someone is considering suicide? Look for sudden signs of withdrawal from friends, family, work, or activities they previously enjoyed. Consider any unusual be-

havior or comments that indicate they are preparing to die, such as giving away prized possessions, making a will, or getting their affairs in order. Also, be mindful of any sudden and severe experiences they have had that they might consider traumatic; loss of a loved one, public humiliation, victimization, or failure. And, is there a sudden change in behavior? Do they take more risks than normal?

If you have a friend or relative you believe may be thinking of suicide, always take that seriously. If your instinct is telling you that something is wrong, then it's worth discussing. Don't be afraid that you are going to plant the idea in their head. This is something you can and should discuss if you are concerned. Sometimes, that show of concern can be the most powerful weapon to prevent a suicide attempt.

Besides bringing the subject up



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for discussion, there are several other resources you can call upon to help your friend. Your community mental health center, private counselors or counseling agencies, physicians, or your spiritual leader can help. In a real emergency, the best way to get your friend started on the path of professional intervention is to call 911 or get

them to the nearest emergency room.

**If you or someone you know needs help, you can call 1-800-273-8255 for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline.**