

Two Major Public Health Crises That Are Closely Linked

September is National Suicide Prevention and Awareness Month; suicide is often taboo and stigmatized. This month spreads awareness and attempts to shift the public's perception and share information with people affected by suicide. Suicide consistently ranks in the top ten causes of death nationally.

Domestic violence, also called "domestic abuse" or "intimate partner violence" is defined as a pattern of behavior in a relationship that is used to maintain or gain power or control over a partner. That abuse can be sexual, emotional, physical, economic, or psychological actions or threats of those actions that influence someone. That also includes any behavior that could frighten, intimidate, manipulate, hurt, blame, injure/wound someone, or terrorize them.

Suicide and intimate partner violence are both major public health crises, and they're closely linked. Domestic violence (DV) is a factor in up to one-quarter of female suicide attempts and they have eight times the risk of committing suicide compared to the general population. Single females have higher suicide rates than married females. With that being said, if DV is present in a marriage, the risk of suicide definitely increases. Pregnant women in a domestic violence situation also increase the risk of suicide. Statistics show that one in twelve pregnant women experience hits to the abdomen, breasts, or genitals and 20% of those women attempt suicide. Survivors of DV are twice as likely to attempt suicide multiple times. We also need to add that 72% of murder-suicides were committed in a domestic abuse relationship. In that dynamic, studies show that most of the victims of murder-suicides were women and that the killers were men. Please understand and acknowledge that domestic abuse can happen to any race, sexual orientation, religion, gender, financial status, or age.

Some signs to look for when worried about someone who may be needing help include:

- Someone talking about wanting to be dead or killing themselves.
- Someone looking for ways to kill themselves.
- Someone talking about feelings of hopelessness or having no reason to live.
- Someone talking about feeling like a burden to others.
- An increase in alcohol or drug abuse.
- If someone is acting anxious, gets easily agitated, or starts to behave recklessly.
- Change in sleep patterns, starting to sleep too much or too little.
- If someone starts to isolate themselves.
- Someone displaying extreme mood swings.

It is also important to recognize the link between suicide and domestic abuse. Some survivors may come forward with information about their domestic abuse but will not mention all the feelings that accompany it.

Taking these five steps could save a life:

- 1) ASK – "Are you thinking about suicide? Asking this question in a supportive way helps communicate that you are not judging and that you are open to speaking about suicide. Other questions to ask are "How can I help?" or "How do you hurt?". Do NOT ever promise to keep their thoughts of suicide a secret.
- 2) BE THERE- Being there could mean being physically present, talking to them over the phone or texting when they need someone or any other ways that show them support.

Two Major Public Health Crises That Are Closely Linked

- 3) HELP KEEP THEM SAFE- After it is established that suicide is being talked about it is important to find things that will keep them safe immediately. Ask them questions like; “Have you already done anything to try to kill yourself?”, “Have you thought of how you would kill yourself?”, “Do you have a plan already made?”, and overall consider if they have access to go through with their planned method.
- 4) HELP THEM CONNECT- It can be scary when a friend or loved one is thinking about suicide. It may be hard to know how to handle the crisis. For an emergency call 911. **If you or someone you know needs mental health or suicide support, call or text 988 or visit the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline chat to connect with a trained crisis specialist.** After the crisis is resolved it could be beneficial to help find them ongoing support and establish a safety net for those times, they may find themselves in a crisis.
- 5) FOLLOW-UP – After all is said and done, you have helped them stabilize their situation. Make sure to follow up with them and see how they are doing.

When thinking of those 5 steps also keep in mind these DO’S AND DON’T’S:

- Be direct. Talk openly and matter-of-factly about suicide.
- Be willing to listen. Allow expressions of feelings. Accept the feelings.
- Be non-judgmental. Don’t debate whether suicide is right or wrong, or whether feelings are good or bad. Don’t lecture on the value of life.
- Get involved. Become available. Show interest and support.
- Don’t dare him or her to do it.
- Don’t act shocked. This will put distance between you.
- Don’t be sworn to secrecy. Seek support.
- Offer hope that alternatives are available
- Take action. Remove means, like weapons or pills.
- Get help from people or agencies specializing in crisis intervention and suicide prevention.

Another thing to address when talking about suicide is how to cope with the loss. Many feel guilt that they should have done more to prevent it, you may be upset that the clues leading up to it were all missed, and you may even feel angry that your loved one abandoned you. It is important to remember, it was their choice and not yours. With that being said, it is important to understand that your grief is personal to YOU. Everyone copes differently and everyone's situation is different. There is no right or wrong way to grieve. Remember not to judge yourself or how others may be coping, and not to let others change your mind about how you should be thinking or feeling. If you are looking for resources around your area to help with mental health support please reach out to <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help>.

Two Major Public Health Crises That Are Closely Linked

Domestic violence has many signs. It is important to recognize these signs and if you need assistance please reach out. WRAP provides free & confidential services to victims of domestic violence and/or human trafficking in Lincoln, Lyon, Redwood, & Yellow Medicine counties. WRAP can be reached at 1-800-639-2350 (after business hours calls are forwarded to Safe Avenues in Willmar). If you would like to learn more information about WRAP please visit www.letswrap.com or check out our Facebook or Instagram pages!

<https://criminal-justice.iresearchnet.com/types-of-crime/domestic-violence/female-suicide/>

<https://rcdvcpc.org/september-2019-suicidality-and-domestic-violence-six-things-dv-providers-need-to-know.html>

<https://www.domesticshelters.org/articles/health/domestic-violence-survivors-at-higher-risk-for-suicide>