

SUICIDE FAQs: FACT SHEET FOR JOB CORPS STAFF

What is a Gatekeeper?

A Gatekeeper is a person who is in a position to recognize the warning signs that someone may be contemplating suicide. Most Job Corps staff members can be Gatekeepers.

What is the difference between a suicide threat and a suicide attempt?

Suicide threats include statements like “You’ll be sorry when I’m dead” and “I can’t see any way out.” These statements may indicate serious suicidal feelings. A **suicide attempt** is when someone injures him or herself, but does not die.

How can you tell who is at risk for suicide?

You can never be certain who will commit suicide; however, there are some risk factors to look for.

Risk factors include:

- Previous suicide attempt
- Mental illness
- Problems with alcohol or substance abuse
- Family history of suicide
- Stressful situation or loss
- Friend or family member who committed suicide

What protects students from suicidal behavior?

There are several factors that protect against suicide. These include:

- Strong connections to family and community support
- Support through ongoing medical and mental health care relationships
- Skills in problem solving, conflict resolution, and nonviolent handling of disputes
- Cultural and religious beliefs that discourage suicide and support self preservation

What kind of warning signs should I look out for?

Keep an eye out for students who show sudden changes in mood, drink or do drugs when they haven’t in the past, begin to perform badly in their trade or academics, or start to behave



recklessly. Some signs are very serious. You should take immediate action if you notice any of the following signs:

- A student who threatens to hurt or kill him or herself or makes statements like “Things will be better when I’m gone” or “My family would be better off without me.”
- A student who writes or talks a lot about death, dying, or suicide
- A student who is looking for means to kill him or herself. Means may include firearms, pills, or suffocation methods
- A student who gives away their prized possessions
- A student who is especially calm or happy after a period of depression without resolving their problems
- A student who has attempted suicide in the past and is showing any of the warning signs

What should I do if I think a student is contemplating suicide?

Whatever you do, do not ignore the warning signs. If you think a student is suicidal, ask them directly if they are considering suicide. Listen to what they have to say. If you think there is any chance that a student is contemplating suicide, help them get professional help. This will probably be in the form of a referral to the CMHC.

Is there anything thing that I shouldn't do if I think a student is suicidal?

Yes. There are a few things that you should not do.

- As already stated, don't dismiss or discount and suicide threat. Don't wait to see what will happen.
- This isn't the time for a philosophical argument about whether they should live or die. Only argue that they should live.
- Don't be afraid to talk to the person.
- Don't panic when the person talks about suicide. Try to appear calm. At the same time, try not to appear overly cool. Show concern, not panic.
- Don't argue with the person by making such statements as "This isn't going to make things better" or "Suicide is a sin."
- Don't make light of the situation. Don't joke around and don't change the subject.
- Don't leave the person alone if you think there is an imminent threat.

What if there is a suicide at my center?

After a suicide occurs on (or off) center, your center should conduct a postvention. A postvention is an intervention that occurs after a suicide to support the family, friends, and acquaintances of suicide victims. This is important because those who lose someone from suicide are at an increased risk for suicide. Sometimes suicide is contagious. A postvention offers support and help to prevent additional suicides.

Learn more about bullying, suicide, and violence prevention, and occupational health on the SafetyNet, located at:

<https://supportservices.jobcorps.gov/health/Pages/SafetyNet.aspx>.

References

- Keene State College. Suicide intervention. Resident Assistant Handbook.
http://www.keene.edu/reslife/ra_handbook/helping/suicide_dont.cfm
- National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI). Teenage Suicide.
http://www.nami.org/Content/ContentGroups/HelpLine1/Teenage_Suicide.htm
- National Mental Health Information Center, Center for Mental Health Services. (2001). *National Strategy for Suicide Prevention: Goals and Objectives for Action*. Washington, DC, p. 203.
- National Youth Violence Prevention Resource Center. Depression.
<http://www.safeyouth.org/scripts/teens/depression.asp>
- Suicide Prevention Resource Center. Risk and Protective Factors for Suicide. <http://www.sprc.org/library/srisk.pdf>
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). Suicide warning signs.
<http://mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/publications/allpubs/walletcard/engwalletcard.asp>