

Know the Signs

The month of September is National Suicide Prevention Month. Know the signs someone is at risk and how you can respond.

Family members. Dear friends. Public figures. An acquaintance at the office. We've all known someone lost to suicide. According to the Centers for Disease Control, suicide is the 10th leading cause of death in the United States for all ages; every day, approximately 123 Americans die by suicide. And yet it is a public health crisis that is not often talked about publicly.

This month, in observance of [National Suicide Prevention Month](#), Look insideKP Northern California sat down with Cosette Taillac, LCSW, national strategic leader for Mental Health and Wellness at Kaiser Permanente, to learn more about the signs someone may be at risk, and what we can do to help.

1. Hopelessness

Mentioning in person or on social media things like, "I can't do this anymore," or comments about death, such as, "I don't want to wake up tomorrow."

2. Seeking Out Lethal Means

Buying or asking about a gun, accessing pills, or other harmful objects or substances.

3. Self-Destructive Thoughts and Behavior

Talking about feeling worthless or participating in risky behaviors such as reckless driving or excessive alcohol or drug use.

4. Getting Affairs in Order

Starting to give away prized possessions, saying goodbye with a sense of finality, or making arrangements with people they haven't seen in a long time.

5. Isolation

Starting to withdraw from friends and family. There's increasing social isolation and a sadness that won't let up.

How to Respond

What do you do if you encounter someone exhibiting any of the signs above?

Taillac said that even if a suicidal person is not asking for help, it doesn't mean they don't want it.

"Take any signs seriously and don't be afraid to bring up the subject — you might be saving someone's life," she said. "Listen with an open mind and express concern. Say something like, 'Hey, I noticed how tearful you've been lately, and you mentioned that you don't want to be here anymore. I'm concerned about you and I'm wondering if you've had any thoughts about wanting to die.'"

There's a misconception that by discussing the subject of suicide openly that you're giving someone the idea to hurt themselves, according to Taillac.

"That couldn't be farther from the truth," she said. "It's actually the best thing we can do to help someone. Most people who die from suicide have given clues, even if jokingly, that they were hurting."

She recommends to not say things such as, "I know exactly how you feel. Hang in there. It will pass. Cheer up and think about all the good things in your life."

"This can cause shame and feelings of being misunderstood," Taillac continued. "Sometimes people who have attempted or died from suicide have not been struggling with an existing mental health disorder. Sometimes there's been a recent trauma or life crises."

For immediate help, Taillac recommended the local emergency room, an urgent appointment with a doctor, or a call or online chat with a professional at the [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#) at 1-800-273-8255, where anyone can get free and confidential support 24/7.

She added that anyone can visit Kaiser Permanente's [Find Your Words campaign](#) to view tools and sample scripts of how to speak to someone in need.

"If you're worried about someone in your life, or if you're feeling suicidal, there are many resources to help," said Taillac. "Let's work together to save more lives."