



## Know the Signs Campaign Talking Points

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**How to use this:** *This document explains the Know the Signs campaign. It also offers talking points of how to recognize the warning signs for suicide, how to have a direct conversation with someone you are concerned about and the calls to action for reaching out to find help and resources. You may use this document when talking about the campaign in community presentations, at special events, or if you plan to incorporate the Know the Signs campaign materials into your local County efforts.*

### About the Campaign

The *Know the Signs* campaign is part of statewide efforts to prevent suicide, reduce stigma and discrimination related to mental illness, and to promote the mental health and wellness of students. These initiatives are funded by the Mental Health Services Act (Prop 63) and administered by the California Mental Health Services Authority (CaMHSA), an organization of county governments working to improve mental health outcomes for individuals, families and communities.

This campaign is intended to prepare Californians to prevent suicide by encouraging them to know the warning signs for suicide, find the words to offer help to someone they are concerned about and reach out to local resources.

*Know the signs. Find the words. Reach out.*

Find out more at [www.SuicideisPreventable.org](http://www.SuicideisPreventable.org). Be a part of the campaign and other statewide suicide prevention efforts by joining the Your Voice Counts online forum at [www.yourvoicecounts.org](http://www.yourvoicecounts.org)

### Supporting Points:

*The Know the Signs campaign concept and messaging is based on the following pillars:*

- Tagline “Pain isn’t always obvious” explained: A common emotion among people feeling suicidal is pain. How pain is expressed isn’t always evident to others. But while the warning signs can be subtle, they are there.



- Suicide is a complex issue and cannot be simplified by attributing it to one single cause (job loss, divorce, economic hardship, etc.).
- Studies show that people who know the signs of suicide and resources are more likely to take action that could save a life.
- While EVERY suicide may not be prevented, suicide *is* preventable and people with suicidal thoughts and feelings can be treated.

### **Suicide Statistics (California)**

*\*Note: Counties are encouraged to use local or regional suicide data and statistics where available. It's important to note that the volume of calls to the Lifeline far outweighs completed suicides, which underscores the fact that many more people are reaching out for help than are harming themselves or dying by suicide.*

- In 2010, 3823 Californians took their own lives.  
Source: California Department of Public Health, Safe and Active Communities Branch. Report generated from <http://epicenter.cdph.ca.gov> on: August 8, 2012
- 16,425 people were hospitalized for self-inflicted injuries in the state in 2010.  
Source: California Department of Public Health, Safe and Active Communities Branch. Report generated from <http://epicenter.cdph.ca.gov> on: August 8, 2012
- In 2011, 105,142 calls to the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline were made from California.  
Source: National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (2012). California Call Volume Report: January, 01, 2011 – December 31, 2011. Report generated by the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline on August 8, 2012.

### **Facts about Suicide**

- *Suicide is not inevitable and experts aren't the only ones who can help.* Knowing the warning signs and how to reach out to someone in crisis gives anyone the power to make a difference.
- Mentioning suicide will not anger the person in crisis. People contemplating suicide are often relieved to have the subject raised by someone else in a caring way. It opens the door to have a frank conversation.
- Asking about suicide does NOT put the idea in someone's head.
- The warning signs for suicide can be subtle, but someone experiencing emotional pain almost always shows some type of sign.

## Warning Signs for Suicide

The warning signs for suicide manifest themselves in different ways and each person may express them differently. Some signs are more critical, and may indicate an imminent threat of suicide. Below are the signs of immediate crisis and concern. Learn more about warning signs at [www.SuicideisPreventable.org](http://www.SuicideisPreventable.org).

### ***Signs of Crisis***

*Action: Call 9-1-1, or seek immediate help when you hear or see any one of these behaviors:*

- Someone threatening to hurt or kill themselves
- Someone looking for ways to kill themselves: seeking access to pills, weapons, or other means
- Someone talking or writing about suicide, or about death and dying when this is out of the ordinary for them

### ***Signs of Concern***

*Action: If someone is showing any or a combination of the following behaviors, you or they can call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1 (800) 273-TALK (8255).*

- Talking about wanting to die or suicide
- Increased drug or alcohol use
- Anger
- Feeling hopeless, desperate, trapped
- No sense of purpose
- Reckless behavior
- Withdrawal
- Anxiety or agitation
- Changes in sleep
- Putting affairs in order
- Giving away possessions
- Sudden mood changes

## Risk Factors for Suicide

Risk factors are characteristics that contribute to the likelihood of suicide. Risk factors are based on statistics and may not apply to every suicidal individual. The most common ones are:

- Prior suicide attempt
- Easy access to lethal means (weapons, medications, etc)
- Mental health condition like depression and/or substance abuse
- Poor ability to tolerate and cope with negative emotions
- They know someone close to them who died by suicide

## Calls to Action

- Visit [www.SuicideisPreventable.org](http://www.SuicideisPreventable.org).
- Attend a training that educates people about the signs of suicide and how to help such as Question, Persuade, Refer (QPR) or Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST).
- Get involved in local efforts and get others involved. Visit the Local Resources section of [www.SuicideisPreventable.org](http://www.SuicideisPreventable.org) to find out what's going on in your area, such as action committees, programs, trainings, and events.
- Visit [www.yourvoicecounts.org](http://www.yourvoicecounts.org) to get involved in statewide and local suicide prevention efforts.

## How to Talk About Suicide

Know how to start a conversation. Before starting a conversation with someone you are concerned about, be sure to have crisis resources on hand. Get detailed tips at [www.SuicideisPreventable.org](http://www.SuicideisPreventable.org).

### **Step #1: Start the conversation**

- Mention the signs that prompted you to be concerned. This makes it clear that you are not asking “out of the blue,” and makes it more difficult for the person to deny that something is bothering them.
- Ask directly about suicide. “Are you thinking about suicide?” or “Are you thinking about ending your life?” Asking directly and using the word “suicide” establishes that you and the person at risk are talking about the same thing and lets the person know that you are willing to talk openly about suicide.

### **Step #2: Listen, express concern, provide reassurance**

- If they answer “yes” to your direct question about suicide, stay calm and don’t leave the person alone until further help is obtained.
- Listen to the reasons the person has for both living and dying. Validate that they are considering both options and underscore that living is an option for them.
- Let the person know you care. Letting them know that you take their situation seriously, and you are genuinely concerned about them, will go a long way in your effort to support them.

### **What not to say**

- Don’t ask in a way that indicates you want “No” for an answer. (For example, “You’re not thinking about suicide, are you?!” or “You’re not thinking of doing anything stupid, are you?!”)
- Don’t tell the person to do it. You may want to shout in frustration or anger, but this is the most dangerous thing you can say.
- Don’t promise secrecy. The person may say that they don’t want you to tell anyone else that they are suicidal. You may be concerned that they will be upset with you, but when someone’s life is at risk, it is more important to ensure their safety.

### **Step #3: Create a Safety Plan**

- Ask the person if they have access to any lethal means (weapons, medications, etc) and help remove them from the vicinity. (Another friend, family member or law enforcement agent may be needed to assist with this.)
- Do not put yourself in danger; if you are concerned about your own safety, call 9-1-1.
- Create a safety plan together. Ask the person what will help keep them safe until they meet with a professional.

- Ask the person if they will refrain from using alcohol and other drugs or agree to have someone monitor their use.
- Get a verbal commitment that the person will not act upon thoughts of suicide until they have met with a professional.

**Step #4: Get help**

- Provide the person with national or local resources. Call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline anytime at 1-800-273-8255. Local resources can be found at [www.Suicideis Preventable.org](http://www.SuicideisPreventable.org).
- If you feel the situation is critical, take the person to a nearby Emergency Room or walk-in psychiatric crisis clinic or call 9-1-1.