

Suicide Prevention and Support

Suicide is a desperate attempt to escape suffering that has become unbearable. Blinded by feelings of self-loathing, hopelessness, and isolation, a suicidal person cannot see any way of finding relief except through death.

The World Health Organization estimates that approximately 1 million people die each year from suicide. It is difficult to understand what drives so many people to take their own lives. But, a suicidal person is in so much pain that he or she can see no other option, than to end their lives.

Who is at risk?

While the link between suicide and mental disorders (in particular, depression and substance use disorders) is well established in high-income countries, many suicides happen impulsively in moments of crisis with a breakdown in the ability to deal with life stresses, such as financial problems, relationship break-up or chronic pain and illness.

In addition, experiencing conflict, disaster, violence, abuse, or loss and a sense of isolation are strongly associated with suicidal behaviour. Suicide rates are also high amongst vulnerable groups who experience discrimination, such as refugees and migrants; indigenous peoples; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex (LGBTI) persons; and prisoners. By far the strongest risk factor for suicide is a previous suicide attempt.

Tips on how to support someone who may be suicidal. It is important to acknowledge that it can be frightening to discover that someone is thinking about taking their own life.

1. Listen and take them seriously: If someone tells you that they are thinking of committing suicide, do not ignore them or brush it off; take it seriously
2. Ask direct questions: ask the question: are you thinking of killing yourself?
3. Do not judge: encourage them to get help and empathise that suicide is not the solution
4. Focus on the here and now: assess the risk, is there a plan, is there access at that point in time. If you are with the person, remove potential means of suicide; such as poison, weapons, medications etc. Stay with them or arrange for someone to look after them.
5. Lastly, be calm supportive and refer to a professional.

If you or someone you know is at risk of suicide and need emergency assistance, please contact the following **emergency numbers**:

SADAG: 080 0567 567

Lifeline: 011 728 1347

You can also contact **Student Health and Wellness** as follows:

Email: studenthealth@unisa.ac.za

Tel: **0124296420**

www.unisa.ac.za