

Helping Someone who is Considering Suicide

There are many reasons why employees or leaders may not address mental health concerns in the workplace. Some of these reasons may include stigma (judgment and shame from self or others), or lack of knowledge about what to say or do. This guide will offer suggestions for helping someone who may be thinking about suicide.

In the Workplace

HR leaders, supervisors, co-workers, and EAP professionals are all in a position to identify and help someone at risk for suicide. An employee may display suicidal symptoms in the workplace by talking about it to a coworker, making comments about death or self-harm, or acting strange or out of character.

Warning Signs of Suicide

- Acting sad or withdrawn
- Distracted, decreased, erratic work performance
- Missing an unusual number of work days
- Making statements such as:
 - “You won’t have to worry about me.”
 - “No one would miss me if I were gone.”
- Giving away personal belongings
- Statements about hurting or killing themselves
- Talking or writing about death, dying or suicide

- Asking about details of their life insurance policy, especially as it relates to cause of death
- Showing interest in end-of-life affairs, such as making a will, discussing funeral preferences, etc.
- Obtaining lethal means, like a gun, pills, rope, etc.

How to Reach Out To a Distressed Employee

The best course of action is to take the threat of suicide seriously, but stay calm. Talk **compassionately** and directly with the employee about your concerns. If you see any of the above warning signs, confront the employee in a compassionate and caring way.

1. Ask questions –Find out if the person is having suicidal thoughts by asking, “I’m concerned about you because...

have you been thinking about hurting or killing yourself?”

2. Offer help –Encourage them to talk to EAP or the crisis hotline. Ask them if you can call a close family member or friend on their behalf.

3. Connect – Call EAP or another support person or agency with the employee in the room.

The employee’s privacy is important; however, do not promise to keep the matter confidential. Explain that you will do everything to protect their privacy and will only share necessary information to maintain their well-being and safety—because you care.

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Ask Questions, Offer Help, Connect

Ask questions.

- Meet with the employee as soon as possible in a private place. Don't leave them alone.
- Give yourselves plenty of time to talk. Listen and care.
- Be compassionate and direct.
- Let the employee know about your concerns. Share your observations of their behavior changes. Express your concern and desire to help them. Offer hope that there are solutions to their problems.
- Do not question the client about their personal problems, offer solutions, minimize concerns or challenge their thinking. For example, avoid making statements such as "It's not that bad," or "Everything happens for a reason."
- Ask the employee about suicide. This will not give them ideas or put them at risk. Studies show that asking these questions gives people a sense of relief that they can talk about it.
- Memorize and ask these three basic screening questions from the Columbia-Suicide Severity Rating (or C-SSRS—see their website for more information about this tool):
 - 1). Have you wished you were dead?
 - 2). Have you had thoughts of suicide?
 - 3). Have you ever done anything, or started to do, anything to end your life?

Offer help.

- Explain that you can connect them to someone who can help.
- Let them know you would like to notify a close family member or friend who can help keep them safe.
- Ask them if they will agree to talk to someone from EAP or the crisis hotline.
- When they agree, call the number immediately.

Connect.

- Ascension WI EAP's phones are answered by counselors. Explain the situation, giving the basic facts. The EAP counselor will provide options for assisting the employee.
- The EAP counselor can speak with the employee over the phone. Ask the employee if you can talk with the EAP counselor after their conversation for follow up recommendations.
- Let them speak in private. Make sure the employee has paper/pen to write on.
- During the phone call the EAP counselor will assess risk. Some recommendations could be a referral to the emergency room, an urgent EAP appointment, a call to the employee's therapist, or contacting a family member for transportation and follow up.
- Before the employee leaves be sure to schedule a follow up meeting to check in with them. Your ongoing support is important.

Urgent Concerns

If you become aware of a distressed employee while they are offsite or not working that day:

- Don't wait for their next scheduled day onsite.
- Call them and follow the above steps.
- Offer to connect them to EAP via conference call.
- If the situation remains urgent, call 911 and give the employee's location. Police will go to their home and check on them.

The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is here to help you before, during, and after a crisis. Remember to take care of yourself and seek support to process the situation as needed. You can schedule your own EAP appointment if more support is needed.

Ascension WI EAP

(800).540.3758
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