Facts About Suicide

• Suicide is the 11th leading cause of death in the US. In 2000, 28,332 Americans die from suicide. 10 deaths for every 100,000 people.
• More that 90% of completed suicides occur in individuals with depression or another diagnosable mental or substance abuse disorder. Mood disorders have been shown consistently to increase suicide risk. Substance abuse is also a risk factor.
• People with a parent, sibling, aunt, uncle or grandparent who attempted or died from suicide are at increased risk for suicide.

Risks for Suicide

• History of attempts
• Talks about suicide or death
• History of emotional crises or instability
• Substance Abuse
• Perfectionistic – need to be “exceptional to be acceptable”
• Have means to succeed– like guns or a stash of pills
• The more realistic and detailed of a suicide plan, the more risk
• Suddenly feeling better, showing uncharacteristic peacefulness or relief
• Giving away belongings, not willing to make plans, saying or writing things that seem to suggest
• “Cleaning up affairs”
• Isolating, not answering phone calls, unwilling to talk

Remember This

No one has the power to make someone commit suicide, and no one ultimately has the power to stop someone from suicide.

Take Care of Yourself

Dealing with a suicidal person can be quite stressful. Take steps to take care of yourself. Do not hesitate to obtain support for yourself through your own supervisor or the Employee Assistance Program.
What If I Am Concerned About a Co-Worker?

Listen carefully. People who are thinking about suicide may give hints about their intentions. Saying to co-workers that the future looks hopeless or that life is not worth living anymore are examples of hints of possible suicidal intent. Always take these remarks seriously. Talk to the employee privately and supportively ask what he or she meant by the statement(s). You won’t make the situation worse by clarifying the meaning of the person’s comments. This kind of supportive approach can provide the employee with a sense of relief and may be the first step towards helping the person feel better as well as accessing professional services.

Do not ask the employee about his or her personal problems but listen to what is being said. The employee may not wish to discuss his or her personal problems. However, if the employee initiates such a discussion, be prepared to listen and be supportive. Do ask if any of the employee’s concerns are work-related. If this is the case make an effort to explore the concerns with the intention of trying to resolve them, if at all possible. This kind of support can bring about significant relief to a stressed employee.

Do not offer advice or suggest that the employee should not feel suicidal. People who contemplate suicide typically do so with a great deal of fear, shame and sadness. Talking about such thoughts can be very difficult. A suggestion that the person shouldn’t feel that way may lead to defensiveness and a feeling that he or she is not being heard or supported. Protect the employee’s privacy. This is very important. For example, what specifically do management personnel need to know about the employee’s personal situation? Can the appropriate staff be simply informed that the employee is on a medical leave or on a reduced work schedule due to medical reasons?

Identify resources for the person. The employee has to make a choice whether to get professional help or not, but you can make sure the person knows where to get help. Many times they already have a therapist – if not, direct them to their PCP or the EAP or both. If you are not sure about severity, risk or acuity, call EAP to consult any time, 24 hours a day.

Providing Support

• Will the employee benefit from some flexibility in his or her work schedule to attend counseling sessions?

• Should workplace accommodations be considered (e.g., reduced work load or asking the employee if there are certain times of the workday when he or she feels better or has more energy and making adjustments in work responsibilities accordingly – depressive symptoms can sometimes be worse in the morning and gradually improve throughout the day)?

• Provide clear and supportive feedback about work expectations while the employee is recovering by focusing on positives, pointing out specific work-related behaviors that can be addressed and emphasizing the individual’s strengths?

• Don’t be alone with knowledge that a coworker or friend is actively suicidal. Who you ask for help depends on the situation – it could be the EAP, the person’s PCP or therapist, or 911.

• Don’t leave the person alone – make sure they agree to be with someone at all times until stable or under the care/supervision of someone else.