

THE SUICIDAL STUDENT

Suicide is the second leading cause of death among college students. Anyone may become suicidal when life's stressors perilously exceed coping skills. Most students, however, will be intensely ambivalent toward suicide and will usually respond to help. High risk indicators include: feelings of hopelessness, helplessness, and futility; a severe loss or threat of loss; a detailed suicidal plan; history of a previous attempt; history of alcohol or drug abuse; and feelings of alienation and isolation. Suicidal students usually want to communicate their feelings and the inability to do so may result in rage or anger directed toward themselves.

DO:

- Call UPD (campus police) at 9-911 or dial 972-2093 if immediate emergency intervention is needed.
- Take the student seriously - 80% of suicidal persons give warning of their intent.
- Acknowledge that a threat of, or attempt at, suicide is a plea for help.
- Be available to listen, to talk, to be concerned, but refer the student to the Counseling Center or other appropriate agency when you get overwhelmed or when you need a professional consultation or assistance.
- Minister to yourself. Helping someone who is suicidal is hard, demanding, and draining work.
- When making an emergency referral, it is helpful to escort the student to the Counseling Center to ensure that they receive appropriate assessment and treatment.

DON'T:

- Minimize the situation or depth of feeling, e.g., "Oh it will be much better tomorrow."
- Be afraid to ask the person if they are so depressed or sad that they want to hurt themselves (e.g., "You seem so upset and discouraged that I'm wondering if you are considering suicide.")
- Over commit yourself and, therefore, not be able to deliver on what you promise.
- Ignore your limitations. Dealing with seriously depressed and/or suicidal persons is a job for a trained mental health professional.

* Adapted from: Helping the Emotionally Distressed Student. Organization of Counseling Center Directors in Higher Education; 1999