THE SUICIDAL STUDENT

Suicide is the second leading cause of death among college students. It is important to view all suicidal comments as serious and make appropriate referrals. Watching for some of the following behaviors will also give you clues to what is going on with a student. If several of these are true, refer the student to psychological counseling services in the Student Health & Wellness Office.

High Risk Suicidal Indicators:
- Expresses hopelessness or guilt.
- Sudden mood or behavior changes
- Giving possessions away
- Expresses that life is not worth the trouble
- Feelings of helplessness and futility
- A severe loss or threat of loss
- Sleeping much more and later than normal
- Not sleeping well and waking up early
- Taking frequent naps
- Withdrawing from friends and family
- Not attending class
- Abusing alcohol and drugs
- Engaging in high risk behaviors
- Change in appetite so the student is not hungry or overeats
- Taking care of business
- A lift in depression, surge of energy

Facts About Suicides:

1. College students have higher suicide rates than non-college people of the same age.
2. More men complete suicide, but more women attempt.
3. There are more attempts at the beginning and end of semesters.
4. People committing suicide rarely want to die; they really want to end the pain they experience.
5. Talking about suicide will not plant the idea in a person’s mind, but will probably relieve some of the tension they experience.
6. Suicides rarely occur without warning.
7. Feeling isolated (no support group) increases the likelihood for suicide.
8. The more developed the suicide plan, the greater the likelihood.
9. If the student has made attempts in the past, he/she is at higher risk for future (and possibly more serious) attempts.

To assess a student at risk for suicide, there are generally four areas that we explore. We ask the student about a plan, means, recent losses, and any previous attempts he or she has made at suicide.

Plan – Do you have a well-developed plan that includes an easily available method to harm (kill) yourself?

Means – Do you use substances such as alcohol and other drugs that can weaken impulse control?
Prior Behavior – Have you attempted suicide before?

Loss Due to Suicide – Has a friend, family member or acquaintance taken his/her life through suicide?

Examining these four areas will help in determining the severity of the threat of a student taking his/her life.

Response:

If you encounter what appears to be a suicidal student, the following actions may help:

1. Talk about suicide openly and directly.
2. Be confident, caring and know the resources available.
3. Take charge and escort the student the Student Health & Wellness Office during regular day time hours or call Campus Safety after 4:00 pm weekdays and anytime during the week-ends.
4. Listen to the small voice inside that says, “Something isn’t right with this student.” (Take the student seriously; 80% of suicides give warning of their intent.)

The following actions may not be helpful:

1. Ignore comments like, “I won’t be a problem much longer,” or “Nothing matters; It’s no use.”
2. Be too busy to intervene.
3. Be afraid of planting the idea of suicide in an already depressed person’s mind. They will feel relieved that someone has guessed.
4. Get involved with the student without help from professionals. Referral is imperative. If the student refuses help and you believe s/he may follow through with their threat immediately contact Campus Safety at 242-7910 or dial 9-911.