



Suicide Prevention Training for UW-Madison Faculty and Staff

“Recognize – Respond – Refer” Overview

Recognize

Most people experiencing suicidal thoughts will show outward signs of distress. These signs will vary from person to person, and some individuals might not show any signs at all. Recognizing these common warning signs could help identify a person in need of support.

Suicide Warning Signs

- Referencing or talking about suicide or a desire to not live anymore
- Out-of-character behavior, such as giving away possessions
- Lowered self-worth or confidence; feeling like a burden; feeling hopeless
- Not showing up for obligations; isolating
- Changes in mood
- Sleep disruption
- Relationship difficulties; recent breakup or falling out
- Less attention to personal hygiene

Respond

Responding to someone in distress can be daunting, but it is essential. Do not ignore warning signs because you are unsure of what to do; taking action is always the best choice. Remember, it’s not about saying exactly the right words. Show that you care, demonstrate that you’re available to listen, and be there to support them.

Initiating a Check-in

Once you are in a private, comfortable place:

1. Name the specific warning signs you have recognized.
2. Ask permission to check-in further.

Tips for Responding

- Express concern openly and honestly.
- Listen without judgment. Do not lecture about the value of life, or minimize problems. Avoid saying things like: “You have so much to live for,” “Your suicide will hurt your family,” or “Look on the bright side.”
- Offer hope. Reassure the person that help is available and that the suicidal feelings are temporary. Let the person know that his or her life is important to you.
- Be direct. Talk openly and ask directly about suicide. Many people worry that talking about suicide could put the idea in someone’s head – but research suggests that typically people in distress will experience relief when asked about their thoughts. Asking directly shows that you are ready to listen to their feelings and support them through anything.
- Do not be sworn to secrecy. You need to feel comfortable reaching out for help if necessary. You can always consult the [UHS Mental Health Crisis Line](#).

**UW–Madison
24/7 Mental Health Crisis Line
608-265-5600 (option 9)**

Refer

For referrals to be successful, they should ideally:

- Be responsive to student needs, as understood by the student
- Be collaborative, not coercive
- Be responsive to student beliefs and identities

Referring Students Based on Urgency

Non-urgent: Does not require prompt action, but intervention is still necessary or recommended. The issue can wait at least until the next business day. Example: A student is struggling with academics and depression, but has not had thoughts of suicide.

Recommendation: Encourage the student to set up an [Access Appointment](#) at University Health Services (UHS).

Urgent: Requiring prompt action; may turn into an emergency if not addressed quickly. Needs to be addressed today. Example: A student states that they have stockpiled medication at home, and are considering attempting suicide once they leave.

OR

Uncertain level of urgency: It is unclear how urgent the situation is, due to lack of information (e.g., student declines checking in) or confusing information. Examples: Students states they are “fine,” but is exhibiting multiple warning signs for suicide. Student reports that they have been having thoughts of suicide over the last few days, but currently are not having those thoughts.

Recommendation: Encourage the student to call the 24/7 UHS crisis line. UHS has trained mental health professionals who can better assess the student’s safety, get the student matched with resources depending on urgency of the situation, and can collaboratively create a plan with the student. You can also call with the student.

Emergency: An immediate threat to health or life. Example: A student has a weapon and is threatening to harm themselves or you.

Recommendation: If someone is in immediate danger, you may need to consider calling 911. Involving law enforcement can be frightening and stigmatizing. It is not an option that feels safe, comfortable, or accessible for everyone, and should be reserved for the most extreme circumstances.