

The best predictor of suicide is a previous suicide attempt.

According to one recent study, people who have attempted suicide once remain at risk of another try for the rest of their life (Jenkins, 2010).

In Australia, while men complete suicide more than women, women are more likely to be admitted to hospital following a suicide attempt.



This fact sheet provides information about people who attempt suicide and their experience. It also provides a list of some ways to support attempters and their families.

Why do they do it?

People who have survived a suicide attempt describe their feelings of great sadness and hopelessness at the time of their attempt:

*"dread pouring down on me
overpowering and drenching
dread at realizing
that this is all more than me
I was doomed from the beginning"*
(posted online March 2011)

"the fear of living is more than fear of dying"....
(posted online March 2011)

*"People always tell me that suicide is just pity bull ****, I say it's a way out of life when you can't stand it anymore.."*
(posted online November 2009)

According to Survivors of Suicide (SOS), people usually attempt suicide to block unbearable emotional pain, which is caused by a wide variety of problems. A person attempting suicide is often so distressed that they are unable to see that they have other options. Suicidal people often feel terribly isolated; because of their distress, they may not think of anyone they can turn to, furthering this isolation. In the vast majority of cases, a person attempting suicide would choose differently if they were not in great distress and were able to evaluate their options objectively. Most suicidal people give warning signs in the hope that they will be rescued, because they are intent on stopping their emotional pain, not on dying.

Issues faced by suicide attempters and their families

When someone has attempted suicide once, their life and the lives of those who love them is forever changed.

Below is a list of some of the issues faced by those who attempt suicide and those who love them:

- Guilt and shame over a suicide attempt prevents many families from getting the help they need to work through the crisis. Some families will deny or minimise the attempt and some attempters will also downplay the incident so that they do not have to confront their feelings.
- Feelings of guilt and shame over putting their family through the pain of a suicide attempt only adds to the feelings of worthlessness and hopelessness that have led to the attempt in the first place.

- There is often a sense that the family/friends need to 'watch over' the attempter. While at first this may be comforting to the attempter, over time this may start to feel burdensome to the family and intrusive to the attempter.
- There may also be a need for the attempter to seek help for mental illness (counselling, drug therapy etc.). The diagnosis and stabilisation process takes time and can be very stressful on families.
- Some attempters are angry that they failed to complete suicide and may still be at significant risk of completing suicide. Out-patient care and follow up is important, as is helping those around them to understand how to help keep their loved one safe.
- The biggest predictor of completed suicide is a previous suicide attempt. For this reason it is essential that the attempter and their families are made aware of the risks and given access to resources that will support them on an on-going basis.

How can you help?

There are a number of key ways in which friends and family can help someone who has attempted suicide:

1. Spend time working on their own feelings and emotions. In order to help the attempter, those around them also need to take care of themselves and be aware of how the attempt has affected them.
2. Seek professional assistance. A suicide attempt is a serious medical emergency and requires the expertise of doctors and mental health workers. Someone who has attempted to take their own life needs follow up care and assistance from experts to enable them to manage their mental health.
3. Try to minimise access to means of suicide. Whilst it is impossible to watch someone all of the time, it is important that friends and family try to identify potential risk factors and methods of suicide and minimise these wherever possible. Safety of the attempter is the number one priority after an attempt.
4. Be mindful of other family members or friends who may also be at risk. Often siblings or partners can feel 'left out' when all of the attention is given to the 'attempter'. Taking time out to help each other and talk about how everyone is coping with the situation is very important. This is even more essential when the attempter was discovered by a family member or close friend.



Useful resources and websites

- <http://www.livingisforeveryone.com.au/ignitionSuite/uploads/docs/LIFE-Fact%20sheet%209.pdf>
- <http://www.news-medical.net/news/2007/04/15/23548.aspx>
- http://www.suicidology.org/c/document_library/get_file?folderId=229&name=DLFE-96.pdf
- http://www.survivorsofsuicide.com/faq_suicide.shtml
- <http://www.healthyplace.com/depression/suicide/suicide-the-risk-is-lifelong-for-those-whove-tried-it-once/menu-id-68/>

Contact Us:

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