

WARNING SIGNS FOR SUICIDE RISK

- Talking about wanting to die or kill themselves.
- Looking for a way to kill themselves, such as searching online or buying a gun.
- Preoccupation with death and dying.
- Talking about feeling hopeless or having no reason to live.
- Talking about feeling trapped or in unbearable pain.
- Talking about being a failure.
- Talking about being a burden to others.
- Increasing use of alcohol or drugs.
- Acting anxious or agitated; behaving recklessly/impulsively.
- Sleeping too little or too much.
- Abandoning favorite activities.
- Neglecting personal appearance.
- Persistent physical complaints.
- Withdrawing or isolating themselves.
- Showing rage or seeking revenge.
- Displaying extreme mood swings.
- Abrupt improvement after a long period of sadness or withdrawal.
- Abrupt interest in “putting their life in order” with wills/possessions, etc.

How do I know if it’s a warning sign?

Context is key – ask yourself: “Are there other warning signs present?”

Other questions you can ask yourself:

1. What made you concerned? Tone of voice? Manner? Did they seem different?
2. What is the context? Is your 44 year-old friend asking you to witness his will, or is he carefully describing how and where to find his will “just in case something happens?” Is your sister asking you your thoughts about living wills, or intently insisting that you promise to tell the doctors to stop life support, “if I suddenly die?” Is your 73 year-old aunt giving her engagement ring to your daughter as an heirloom, or is she giving away everything, even items she uses frequently?
3. How isolated is this person? Are they surrounded by caring family who check on them regularly? Do they live alone and rarely go out?
4. Has their behavior changed significantly? Have they stopped their favorite activities, with no real reason, or have they gotten a new job and just can’t take time to go hunting right now? Are they usually cheerful, and suddenly seem very blue, or very irritable, for an extended time?
5. Has something significant happened in this person’s life recently? Have they recently divorced? Has a loved one or friend died? Have they lost their job?

Remember, it’s never a bad thing to show someone you care. You can always just ask how they’re doing. If it’s not a warning sign of something more serious, all the better. But wouldn’t you rather be sure?