

WHEN IT MAY BE UNSAFE FOR YOU TO HELP...

The most common best practice recommendation in working with an actively suicidal person or a person who is at risk of suicidal behavior is “do not leave the person alone” – but there are times when this may be unsafe for you.

We all understand that when someone has a gun, we may be at immediate risk, even if the other person insists they will not shoot. There are other forms of danger that we don't think of as quickly or clearly. We may also be in danger if deadly weapons are not present.

If you are caught in a suicidal crisis, some reasons it may be unsafe for YOU to be the one to respond and offer help include unhealthy or abusive relationships, recently ended relationships, and your own mental health.

THINK ABOUT:

- Has the person been physically, emotionally or psychologically abusive to you in any way in the past? *This can include FRIENDSHIPS as well as romantic relationships.*
- Have you recently ended a deeper relationship with the person threatening suicide?
- Has the person exhibited stalking behavior? *Calling or texting you repeatedly, following you, watching you from a distance, insisting you see them.*
- Is the person accusing you of being the “reason” they are going to kill themselves?
- Is the person demanding an action or promise from you as the only thing will keep them from killing themselves? *Making you promise not to leave them or not leave the house.*
- Is threatening suicide or talking about suicidal thoughts a repetitive behavior that the person shares only with you, and insists you tell no one?
- Does talking about suicide with this person put your own mental health at risk, and make you feel suicidal?

If you answer yes to ANY of these questions, you are not safe. DO NOT try to respond alone.

If you are with the person:

- Try to find a reason to leave the house or building, or even just the room.
- If you cannot leave the building but can leave the room, lock the door and call 911 for help.
- Try to find a reason to have a third party present.
- Wait until it is safer and then leave the building and call 911.

If you are not physically with the person, or if you can safely leave the scene:

- Do **NOT** go to the person.
- Disengage contact as soon as you can.
- Involve a third party immediately.
- Find a person you trust and tell them your concerns – that the person may be suicidal and needs help.
- Ask the third party to follow up.

If talking to the person about suicide is bringing up suicidal warning signs in you:

- End the interaction as soon as you can.
- Try not to fall into sharing suicidal feelings with the other person. It may seem natural to commiserate on how you feel, but this puts you in more danger – discussing how badly you feel with another suicidal person can trigger a downward spiral.
- Contact your mental health provider or a trusted third party to talk to, as quickly as possible.
- Tell them your concerns for the other person, and ask them to respond.
- Talk to them about your own suicidal feelings.

Are you saying that if someone is saying these things, they are just being manipulative?

No. None of this means that the suicidal person is not serious about taking their own life even if they have threatened in the past and not done so. These are signs that **YOU ARE UNSAFE** and you need to protect yourself, physically and emotionally.

They are upset I left them, but I know they would never really hurt me.

You may know this person very well, and may believe they would never hurt you. Under normal circumstances, they might not. But if they are threatening suicide, they are in the grip of a mental illness, and they are not thinking clearly. They may do things that you would never believe they would otherwise do.

*But I love them. We've had problems, but I don't want them to die. How can I **NOT** help them?*

You **ARE** helping, by getting help from a third party. You are not ignoring their pain and need. It is okay to help by going to someone else, even if the person in crisis does not want you to and tells you not to. Sometimes that is the best help you can give. It is okay to put your own physical and psychological safety first. You cannot help them at all, if you are in danger.

*I'm the **ONLY** person they trust to help. I know if I don't help, they won't get help.*

You may be the only person they are willing to ask for help, but you are NOT the only person that CAN and WILL help. If they are insisting that you are the only person they trust to talk to, that is a sign they need to get help from a professional. They may resist going for professional help, but that does not mean you are the only person to help them or the person who should help them. These are all indications that they desperately need additional help in their life.