

Suicide Prevention Conversations

Tips for Talking with Someone You Love



HOW TO HAVE A CONVERSATION

These tips will assist you as you navigate challenging conversations with people contemplating death by suicide.

1. Acknowledge to yourself that this is a scary situation. Be prepared to hear things you may not want to hear. This conversation will impact you. Manage your own thoughts and feelings before, during, and after the conversation.
2. Listen, listen, and listen some more. Try to minimize your side of the conversation.
3. Give them the space and time to vent their feelings by being present [don't look at your phone or watch], listen to their story, and express themselves, cry, or have angry outbursts (not physical violence).
4. Speak in short sentences, using a slower calm voice, and use collaborative talk versus authoritative talk. Authoritative talk: "You need to make an appointment to see a therapist" versus collaborative talk: "Sure, I'll be here with you as you call and make a therapy appointment."
5. Acknowledge their emotional, psychological, or physical pain. You don't have to agree with everything they say to validate their thoughts and feelings. Example: "It sounds like you feel like you have been taken advantage of" lets them know you are listening.
6. Help them explore realistic options and opportunities, but don't tell them what to do or give your advice on how to solve their problems. Advice giving only helps the person giving the advice.
7. Help increase social support, protective factors, and restore their hope that tomorrow can be better.

Special thanks to Dr. Justin Brogan, Associate Professor/Coordinator of the Counseling Program/Human Services Program at Murray State University, for providing this information.