

## Assisting the Suicidal Student

Suicidal crises may be experienced because of a student's personal predispositions, disruptions in social environment or in their life in general. It is often not death itself that is sought rather an end to suffering. The presence of a caring person, the act of listening, the possibility of alternate solutions and hope can keep the suicidal process at bay.

### Did You Know?

- Quebec has one of the highest number of suicides per year in Canada (approximately 1300 deaths per year) ([www.cbc.ca/canada/montreal/story/2006/02/07/qc-suicide-060207.html](http://www.cbc.ca/canada/montreal/story/2006/02/07/qc-suicide-060207.html)) and the second highest suicide rate per 100, 000 persons in Canada.
- Males commit suicide more frequently than females (4:1 in QC) but females more frequently talk about suicide and have more failed attempts than males ([www.aqps.info/activ/sps/2007/statistiques\\_suicides\\_2007.pdf](http://www.aqps.info/activ/sps/2007/statistiques_suicides_2007.pdf)).
- Suicide is the second leading cause of death for youth aged 15 to 24 ([www.safety-council.org/info/community/suicide.html](http://www.safety-council.org/info/community/suicide.html)).
- Up to 30 % of gay and lesbian youth attempt suicide ([www.canadian-health-network.ca](http://www.canadian-health-network.ca)).
- Aboriginal and Inuit communities have rates of suicide up to 6 times higher than the national average ([www.canadian-health-network.ca](http://www.canadian-health-network.ca)).

### What to look for:

- A suicidal person is very ambivalent about whether or not they want to kill themselves. They usually want to receive help but are unsure of how to get it.
- Individuals in a suicidal state are typically not psychotic but are at a loss as to how to get out of the emotional place that they are in.
- **High risk factors** include: feelings of hopelessness, helplessness, multiple losses, recent traumatic events, unattained ideals, academic failures, suicidal ideation, suicidal plan, previous attempt(s), history of drug abuse, history of depression, feelings of alienation and isolation, increased interest in death or life after death.
- Not one factor will predict suicide (unless there is a detailed plan) but rather the more factors that are present, the higher the risk.

### Scenerio:

Martin has noticed a change in one of his classmates and friends, Peter, in the last few weeks and is quite concerned. Martin has noticed that Peter has been in class less and less. When he does show up, Peter doesn't talk to him anymore. When he asks what's going on, Peter says "nothing". Martin believes that Peter is drinking a lot as he can smell alcohol on his breath. Martin knows that his mother died the previous semester and his girlfriend broke up with him a month ago. Finally, one day Martin comes to see you and reports that he saw multiple drawings in Peter's notebook with pictures detailing his own death, complete with phrases of hopelessness.

### If there is an attempt in progress:

Call security (210), 911, and/or Student Services at (355).

### What to do if you believe a student may have suicidal intentions:

- Take the student seriously (over 80 % of individuals who commit suicide give warning of their intent).
- As soon as possible, talk to the student about your concern and perceptions in a non-judgmental manner and listen to what the student has to say.
- Ask directly if he is thinking about suicide.
- Refer him to Student Services (355) for a suicidal risk evaluation ASAP! Counsellors will see a student for an emergency right away.
- Realize your own limitations and boundaries.

**What to avoid:**

- Minimizing the student's feelings or the depth of the situation.
- Being afraid to ask the person if they are so sad or upset that they want to hurt themselves.
- Over-committing to the student without the ability to deliver what you promise.