

The Problem of Suicide

- In 1998, suicide was the eighth leading cause of death for all Americans, the third leading cause of death for those aged 15-24, and the second leading killer in the college population.
- These statistics demonstrate the seriousness of suicide, which is often linked to untreated depression. Clinical depression affects more than 19 million adults every year.
- Although women suffer from clinical depression and attempt suicide more than men, men are more likely to complete the act. Any talk of suicide by a friend or loved one should be taken seriously and help should be sought immediately.

Symptoms

Depression and thoughts of suicide can impact a person's life in many different ways. Not everyone experiences depression and suicidal tendencies in the same way. Some people may have behavioral changes, while others experience physical changes.

Depression and suicide have many common warning signs including:

- Sadness or anxiety
- Feelings of guilt, helplessness or hopelessness
- Trouble eating or sleeping
- Withdrawing from friends and/or social activities
- Loss of interest in hobbies, work, school, etc.
- Increased use of alcohol or drugs
- Anger

Specific signs of potential suicide include:

- Talking openly about committing suicide
- Talking indirectly about "wanting out" or "ending it all"
- Taking unnecessary or life-threatening risks
- Giving away personal possessions

Depression alone or in combination with aggressive behavior, substance abuse and/or anxiety is found in over half of all suicides. If depression is present, substance abuse, anxiety, impulsivity, rage, hopelessness and desperation may increase the risks of suicide.

Suicide can be also be triggered by a number of things including:

- stressful events, such as a failed exam or failure to get a job
- crises in significant social or family relationships
- interpersonal losses
- changes in body chemistry
- high levels of anger or anxiety

How to help a friend

If you notice any of the above warning signs in a friend or loved one, you have reason to be concerned. There are ways that you can be helpful to a friend or loved one who is thinking of taking their own life.

- Be honest and express your concerns. For example, "You seemed really down lately; is something bothering you?"
- Ask directly about thoughts of suicide. For example, "Have you thought of hurting yourself?" If suicidal thoughts are expressed it is important to contact the

- college counselor, 9-1-1 or the local mental health association.
- Listen and offer emotional support, understanding and patience.
 - Convey the message that depression is real, common and treatable. Suicidal feelings are real and preventable.
 - Offer to accompany your friend to see a counselor.

Resources

If you or a friend needs help, please contact 9-1-1. The college counselor and/or one of the resources below are also available. The following organizations may also help, providing additional information about depression and suicide.

If you or someone you know is contemplating suicide, call 1-800-SUICIDE (1-800-784-2433) or www.hopeline.com.

National Mental Health Association
1-800-969-6642 or
www.nmha.org/index.cfm

National Institute of Mental Health
1-800-421-4211 or www.nimh.nih.gov

Copyrighted and published by the National Mental Health Association, no part of this document may be reproduced without written consent.

The National Mental Health Association (NMHA) 2001 N. Beauregard Street, 12th Floor, Alexandria, VA 22311; 1-800-969-6642 TTY: (800) 433-5959
www.nmha.org/index.cfm

Procedures following suicide threats and attempts

The Art Institute of Seattle expects and encourages students to maintain a reasonable concern for their own self-welfare and the welfare of the campus community. Demonstrated suicidal intent or behavior are risk factors for completed suicide and are a violation of The Art Institute of Seattle student code of conduct. In the event that The Art Institute of Seattle has reasonable cause to believe that a student attempted or will attempt suicide or has engaged in efforts to prepare to commit suicide, the School will generally require the student to undergo a mandatory assessment at his or her own expense by an outside licensed mental health professional. Such assessment may include but is not limited to a psychological evaluation at a local hospital and/or emergency room to ensure the safety of the student and the larger community. The assessment should take place immediately and the student should sign a release of information allowing the mental health professional to communicate with school staff information related to the student's safety and well-being.

The purpose of the mandated assessment is to gather information and recommendations about the student's condition, his or her need for psychiatric hospitalization and to provide the student with appropriate psychological and psychiatric referrals. The School will ask the mental health professional to share information about what steps the School might take to protect the safety of the student and the school community at large. Students with psychological impairments which affect the student's ability to function in the school

community (academically, socially or otherwise) may opt for a medical withdrawal or a medical leave of absence. Students who have to be hospitalized due to a suicide attempt and/or suicidal ideation will be placed on interim suspension which will remain in effect until the student provides appropriate documentation from a licensed mental healthcare provider stating that the student can safely return to college and is not believed by the healthcare provider to present a threat to harm himself/herself or others. Notwithstanding, the School at its discretion may set restrictions and/or conditions for the student to return to School including receiving outside counseling, signing a safety contract, and restricting or denying school-sponsored housing accommodations.

The Art Institute of Seattle cannot provide the long-term psychological treatment that is necessary for students experiencing suicidal distress. Because of the serious nature of attempted suicide and/or suicidal ideation, the student's parents or other support person(s) may be contacted by the School and informed of the student's condition. The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) permits school officials to contact parents without the student's consent, "if knowledge of the information is necessary to protect the health and safety of the student or other individuals." If circumstances indicate further harm may come to a student by contacting family members, other options may apply. Failure to adhere to the guidelines outlined herein may result in disciplinary action.