



It is often not easy to recognize signs and symptoms of suicide for what they are.

Signs and symptoms are usually not given in a direct and easy to understand way. People with thoughts of suicide are usually telling us in other ways.

What we see, hear, and sense from them makes us think about the possibility of suicide.

They are warning signs.

The safeTALK¹ and ASIST² training in suicide alertness and intervention, developed by the centre for suicide prevention³, calls these invitations to remind us that they expect a response from us. Invitations can include actions, words, physical signs and feelings. Some common invitations^{3,4} that can be warning signs include:

HOW TO RECOGNIZE SUICIDE



ACTIONS

- Giving away possessions
- Withdrawal from friends, co-workers, family (social isolation)
- Loss of interest in activities and things that are important to them, ignoring patients
- Being noticeably fatigued
- Reckless behaviour, taking risks
- Acting more aggressive or stressed out than usual e.g. lashing out at people, being overly cynical about clients
- Extreme behaviour changes (e.g. being very happy or elated after a period of depression)
- Self-harm including substance/ alcohol abuse and misuse
- Not showing up for work as often or being absent for long periods of time
- Giving away prized possessions
- Tidying up personal affairs, arranging for the care of children, livestock or pets *just in case something should happen*

WORDS

- *"I just can't do this anymore"*
- *"Things would be better if I wasn't around"*
- *"They would be better off without me"*
- *"I am a burden to everyone"*
- *"They will be sorry that I am gone"*
- *"I can't see the point of living anymore"*
- *"There's something I gotta' do right now"*

PHYSICAL SIGNS

- Lack of interest in appearance and personal hygiene
- Sleep disturbances, being tired all the time
- Change/loss of sex interest
- Change/loss of appetite/weight
- Physical health complaints
- Marked changes in behaviour, attitude or appearance

FEELINGS

- Desperation
- Anger or guilt
- Numbed emotions or expressing apathy
- Expressing feelings of hopelessness, helplessness, worthlessness, apathy, sadness or loneliness
- Trapped



Some warning signs require more immediate action than others.

If someone is talking about wanting to die or kill oneself and/or looking for a way to kill oneself or already having a plan, **call 911.**

If you are having thoughts of suicide, tell someone.

Decide who you will tell. Someone who will help you and take you seriously.

If you can't decide on someone, then call The Suicide Support Line:

1-833-456-4566 or **text 45645.**

This is available for anyone in Canada. It is a crisis line for immediate help. It connects people to their local crisis centre.





HOW TO TALK TO A CO-WORKER YOU THINK MAY BE SUICIDAL?

Stay calm, don't judge and ask them if they are feeling suicidal. Mention you have noticed changes in their behaviour and that you are concerned about them:

Tammy, you seem overwhelmed and worried with all the extra sick patients you've been dealing with lately. I noticed you look really tired and have been skipping lunch with all of us more than usual. I am concerned.

Are you OK?

Ask them directly if they have thoughts of suicide and if they have a plan to kill themselves:

Tammy, sometimes when people are worrying, feeling overwhelmed, are fatigued, and withdrawing from others, they are thinking about suicide.

Are you thinking about suicide?

Connect them with their **provincial veterinary employee family assistance plan** (see Appendix A) or their **workplace employee family assistance plan** or **other mental health professionals or resources in your community.**

Suicide rarely comes on its own. Often there are compounding issues like family, financial, or health issues. **The employee family assistance plan providers can help** by providing e-services, resources and face-to-face support on child/elder care, legal issues, mental health counseling, addiction, alcohol/drug use just to name a few.

At any time if you or someone else is feeling suicidal, call the **Suicide Support Line** **1-833-456-4566** or text **45645**. It connects people to their local crisis centre.

REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

1. SafeTALK Suicide Alertness for Everyone. This three-hour workshop emphasizes the importance of recognizing the signs, communicating with the person at risk and getting help or resources for the person at risk. Go to livingworks.net to find a training near you and to learn more about safeTALK.
2. ASIST Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training. This is a 2-day intensive, interactive, and practice-dominated course designed to help people recognize and review risk, and intervene to prevent the immediate risk of suicide. It is the most widely used, acclaimed and researched suicide intervention training workshop in the world. Go to livingworks.net to find a training near you and to learn more about ASIST.
3. The workplace and suicide prevention. Centre for Suicide Prevention. www.suicideinfo.ca. The Centre for Suicide Prevention website has many different types of resources, from infographics to in-depth editorial articles.
4. Manitoba Farm and Rural Stress Line www.supportline.ca/
5. Canadian Mental Health Association Preventing Suicide Resources www.cmha.ca/documents/preventing-suicide

This checklist was written by Dr. Kathy Keil. Dr. Keil studied cognitive and neuropsychology in her undergraduate and graduate psychology degrees prior to attending veterinary school. She is not a licenced psychologist. She has training in Mental Health First Aid, safeTALK suicide awareness, ASIST suicide intervention and is licenced to teach safeTALK. She regularly teaches suicide awareness and basic intervention skills to veterinary professionals and ways for them to take care of their own mental well-being. She is a member of the ABVMA Member Wellness Committee and a technical services veterinarian with Merck Animal Health. She is the leading force behind the Merck-CVMA "It's Time to Talk about Mental Health in Vet Med" Awareness Campaign.

Appendix A

Veterinary Provincial Employee Family Assistance Plan (EFAP) Providers—Check with your association to make sure that you have the most up-to-date information. As of June 25, 2019 the information is as follows:

BC, AB, MB Veterinary Medical Associations EFAP Provider is Homewood Health 1-800-663-1142. Press (1) for immediate crisis support, offered 24/7. www.homeweb.ca

Saskatchewan Veterinary Medical Association EFAP Provider is Professional Psychologists and Counsellors (PPC) 1-306-664-0000 or 1-888-425-7721. office@peopleproblems.ca. www.peopleproblems.ca

Service available to all active general, life practicing and educational SVMA members (must have been licenced for 6 months). Four hours of complimentary services annually. Your licence number is required.

Ontario Veterinary Medical Association EFAP Provider is WorkHealthLife 1-844-880-9137. www.workhealthlife.com Available to OVMA members and their family. Professionals Health Program 1-800-851-6606 (available to veterinarians registered with College of Veterinarians of Ontario only).

Quebec AMVQ Association EFAP Provider is Morneau Shepell 1-800-361-2433. www.travaillsantevie.com

New Brunswick Veterinary Medical Association EFAP Provider is Clinic of Applied Psychology 1-506-858-9180. www.cpamoncton.ca/fr (French) www.cpamoncton.ca/en/ (English). Service available to veterinarians registered with the New Brunswick Veterinary Medical Association. Three complimentary sessions with a psychologist (confidential). Bilingual appointments available in Moncton or with one of their partners across the province.

Nova Scotia Veterinary Medical Association EFAP Provider is the Professional Support Program 1-800-563-3427. Service available to veterinarians registered with the Nova Scotia Veterinary Medical Association.

Prince Edward Island No provincial EFAP Provider. Direct suicide support call 1-800-218-2885.

Newfoundland and Labrador No provincial EFAP Provider. Mental Health Crisis Centre (NL) 1-888-737-4668.

Northwest Territories/ Nunavut/ Yukon No EFAP Provider. Canadian association for suicide prevention NWT 1-800-661-0844. www.nwthelpline.ca and in Nunavut/ Nunavik 1-800-265-3333.

The CVMA also has a list of support services categorized per province.

www.canadianveterinarians.net/documents/resources/vet-health-wellness-helplines-support-services

