


# Suicide Risk During COVID-19



The mental health effects of the current global pandemic present additional risk factors that may affect the suicide crisis. These unprecedented times cause distress and leave many vulnerable to mental health problems. Mental health consequences are likely to be present for much longer than the COVID-19 pandemic because of economic stress, elevated levels of loneliness and lower access to support. Public health interventions and restrictions may act as barriers to treatment accessibility, especially in overwhelmed emergency departments.

For people with preexisting depressive or anxiety disorders, around-the-clock news coverage and an atmosphere of “national anxiety” can function as sources of stress. The exhaustion and burnout among essential workers and health care providers will also raise stress levels in part because of concerns about shortages of protective equipment, overwhelmed facilities and workplace stress.

It is important for those struggling with mental health issues, as well as for those who support them to seek assistance opportunities. These may include telemedicine services, maintaining physical distancing but remaining socially connected, and using telephone-based and written outreach to individuals at risk for suicide.

## Signs someone may be struggling:

- Discussing or fixating on suicide
- Giving away valued possessions
- Behaving recklessly
- Increasing use of alcohol and/or drugs
- Experiencing changes in sleep
- Neglecting basic care of self
- Putting personal business in order
- Neglecting doctor's orders
- Exhibiting an increase in mood swings
- Withdrawing from others

## If you, yourself are struggling:

- **Reach out.** If you are having a difficult time, seek help.
- **Start the conversation.** Find a way to ask for help.
- **Be honest and direct.** It is important for others to know the severity of the situation. It takes courage to speak up.
- **Accept support.** Give others the opportunity to help.
- **Don't isolate yourself.** You may have a desire to disconnect from others. Don't. Many resources are available to intervene, assess and treat the problem.
- **Know your resources.** Crisis lines, counselors, intervention programs and more are available to you along with your EAP.

If you or someone you know is struggling with thoughts of harming themselves, call your EAP and speak with a counselor. We can offer immediate comfort and support and are here to provide you with ongoing professional help. If you are in immediate danger, call 911 or the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 800-273-8255 (800-273-TALK)

This information was adapted from an article by Benjamin Williams for *Psychiatry Advisor*.