

Suicide prevention in the workplace

Suicide is the 10th leading cause of death in the United States. An average of 95 suicides are completed each day.¹ The issue does not stop there. For every one person who completes suicide, there are the many survivors (coworkers, family members, friends of a loved one who died by suicide) left behind to try and understand the actions of their friend.

While the subject can be difficult to approach, it is important that employers do so, considering that the vast majority of individuals who are suicidal often display cues and warning signs. According to the American Association of Suicidology, there are specific warning signs of acute suicidal risk.

Warning signs of acute suicide risk: is path warm?

I—Ideation—Expressed or communicated ideation; threatening to hurt or kill him or herself, or talking of wanting to hurt or kill him or herself; or looking for ways to kill him or herself by seeking access to firearms, available pills, or other means; or talking or writing about death, dying, or suicide, when these actions are out of the ordinary.

S—Substance Abuse—Increased substance (alcohol or drug) use

P—Purposelessness—No reason for living; no sense of purpose in life

A—Anxiety—Anxiety, agitation, unable to sleep or sleeping all the time

T—Trapped—Feeling trapped (like there's no way out)

H—Hopelessness—Hopelessness

W—Withdrawal—Withdrawal from friends, family, and society

A—Anger—Rage, uncontrolled anger, seeking revenge

R—Recklessness—Acting reckless or engaging in risk activities, seemingly without thinking

M—Mood Change—Dramatic mood changes

If warning signs are observed, seek help as soon as possible by contacting a mental health professional or calling 988 for a referral.

Tips for employers

- **Provide convenient and confidential access to resources.** If you have an EAP, make sure your employees know how to access it and how it might be able to help with a variety of situations. Make sure a mechanism for referral is in place.
- **Be observant.** There are many warning signs that a person may be thinking about ending his or her life. Providing access to education can empower you and your employees to react and respond when they see a coworker in trouble.