

## Understanding and Helping the Suicidal Person

### *Be Aware of the Warning Signs*

There is no typical suicide victim. It happens to young and old, rich and poor. Fortunately there are some common warning signs which, when acted upon, can save lives. **A suicidal person might be considering suicide if he or she:**

- Has trouble eating or sleeping
- Experiences drastic changes in behavior
- Withdraws from friends and/or social activities
- Loses interest in hobbies, work, school, etc.
- Prepares for death by making out a will and final arrangements
- Gives away prized possessions
- Has attempted suicide before
- Takes unnecessary risks
- Has had recent severe losses
- Is preoccupied with death and dying
- Increases their use of alcohol or drugs
- Is in intolerable physical or emotional pain

### *What To Do*

- Be direct. Talk openly and matter-of-factly about suicide.
- Be willing to listen. Allow expressions of feelings. Accept the feelings.
- Be non-judgmental. Don't debate whether suicide is right or wrong.
- Don't act shocked. This will put distance between you.
- Don't be sworn to secrecy. Seek support.
- Offer hope that alternatives are available but do not offer glib reassurance.
- Take action. Remove means, such as guns or stockpiled pills.
- Get help from persons or agencies specializing in crisis intervention.

### *Be Aware of Feelings*

Many people at some time in their lives think about suicide. Most decide to live, because they eventually come to realize that the crisis is temporary and death is permanent. On the other hand, people having a crisis sometimes perceive their dilemma as inescapable and feel an utter loss of control. These are some of the feelings and things they may be experiencing:

- They are in intolerable pain
- Difficulty thinking clearly, concentrating or making decisions
- Can't see any way out of current situation or the accompanying pain
- No interest in sleeping, eating or working
- Can't make the sadness go away
- Don't see themselves as worthwhile
- Can't seem to get control or cope with the problem effectively
- Feel alone
- Think they are a burden to others
- No hope. No joy.