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On campus, if you or a staff or faculty member needs immediate help, call the University of Pennsylvania's Help Line, 215-898-HELP (4357), for any wellness inquiry or emergency.

How to Manage a Suicidal Employee: A Practical Guide

As a workplace manager, you play a significant role in creating a culture of health that includes supporting the mental as well as physical health of your workers. You are also well-positioned to notice if your employees are struggling with overwhelming issues that may prompt warning signs that they are considering suicide. While it is not always easy to approach the topic of suicide with an employee, by recognizing and acting on these signs, you can help the employee find professional assistance to become healthier, happier and more productive.

This flyer provides a general checklist of how to respond to an employee who may be contemplating suicide. You will also learn about the support available to you and your employees through the Health Advocate EAP+Work/Life Program.

Know the Warning Signs

Often, people considering suicide feel overwhelmed by stressful situations such as financial or legal pressures, the loss of a relationship, marital dispute, or a chronic illness. Or, they may have a history of depression or another mental health disorder.

Whatever the underlying reason, people who are considering suicide often give hints about their intentions through comments to co-workers, or display certain behavior changes.

Be alert to the following warning signs:

- Talking about wanting to die or end their life
- Making comments like "There's really no reason for living" "Soon you won't have to worry about me" and "Who cares if I'm dead, anyway?"
- Changes in behavior or mood, such as sadness or depression; uncharacteristic withdrawal; neglect of work or appearance

- Suddenly talking about funeral preferences or making a will
- Giving away favorite possessions
- Looking for ways to end their life, such as buying or borrowing a gun

Reach Out – Act Quickly

There is no foolproof way of knowing that someone may be thinking of taking his or her life. However, if you become aware of the threats of suicide or notice the warning signs, you should act quickly to approach the issue with the employee. Approaching the employee with concern, support and understanding can have an impact on their willingness to receive professional help.

Here's what to do:

- Reach out to the person. Meet privately. Ask how he or she is doing. Give them time to share their thoughts and listen without judging.
- Mention that you have noticed changes in the person's behavior or how you became aware of their possible intentions. Ask if they have thoughts about ending their life.

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- Show your concern, but don't ask about their personal problems or offer advice. Offer hope that with appropriate support, there is help for their problem. Mention that you are not trained to help them but that they have access to Health Advocate EAP+Work/Life Licensed Professional Counselors who are trained experts in helping with personal problems.
- Get them to agree to accept help by talking with an EAP Counselor and also agree to not hurt themselves.
- Mention that you will protect their privacy, but don't promise confidentiality. Say you will only share information as necessary to protect their safety.

Connect Them to Help – Call Us

- If the employee agrees to get help, call the Health Advocate EAP+Work/Life Program to reach a Licensed Professional Counselor. Explain the facts. Then, let the employee talk privately with the counselor. Ask if it's ok for the EAP counselor to talk to you after the call so you understand the plan for helping the employee.
- With the employee's permission, the Health Advocate counselor can discuss the plan with you. This may be an urgent appointment with the EAP counselor or a call to the employee's therapist.
- Make an appointment to follow up with the employee.

Remember, the EAP+Work/Life Program is here to help you with your own stress of dealing with a suicidal person. Don't hesitate to call us, 24/7.

We're not an insurance company. West's Health Advocate Solutions is not a direct healthcare provider, and is not affiliated with any insurance company or third party provider.

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In a crisis, act fast. If the danger for self-harm seems imminent, call 911

- Stay with the person (or make sure the person is in a private, secure place with another caring person) until you can get further help.
- Contact the Health Advocate EAP+Work/Life Program and they will help you decide what to do. Or call the Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255) and follow their guidance.
- Consult with HR, security or the appropriate resource at your organization.
- Maintain contact with the employee and the EAP+Work/Life Program to provide appropriate support and follow-up.

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Plan Governance

The selected benefit highlights in this brochure are based on Plan documents that govern the operation of the Plans. If there is any conflict between the information presented here and the information in the Plan documents, the Plan documents always govern and are the controlling legal documents. Benefits descriptions are not terms of employment, nor are they intended to establish a contract between the University and its faculty and staff. Plan documents are available for inspection in the Benefits Office. Copies are available for a small copy fee. The University reserves the right to change, amend, or terminate any of its Benefit Plans for any reason at any time.