

PRECAUTIONS FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE SUICIDAL OR WHO SELF-INJURE

MODULE THIRTEEN



If an individual demonstrates a tendency to suicidal or self-injuring behavior, some general precautions might be implemented. Please check institutional policies to determine recommended procedures for preventing death or serious injury.

Examples include:

- Treating all suicide attempts (even those that appear successful) as medical emergencies
- Placing the inmate in a suicide-resistant location
- Monitoring a person under suicide watch constantly (not intermittently), and if closed-circuit monitoring is used, it should be used ONLY as a supplement to personal observation
- Removing potentially harmful objects (e.g., shoelaces, belts, sharp objects)
- Issuing special utensils for meals and counting these to assure that they are returned
- Requiring authorization to access potentially dangerous materials
- Monitoring the individual's social interactions for signs of exploitation or bullying by others (e.g., others providing self-injurers with prohibited materials)
- Refraining from use of pepper spray on persons who self-injure, as the spray may cause extreme pain on cuts and abrasions

It's important to determine if a person's life is in danger. It's ok to ask directly.

- Are you thinking of taking your life right now?
- Have you made a suicide plan?



Listen to the person without interrupting. Don't be judgmental. Listen to the suicidal person's feelings.

You can ask open-ended questions such as:

- When did you begin feeling like this?
- Did something happen that made you start feeling this way?
- What do you need right now?

Don't offer meaningless platitudes like, "You'll feel better soon," or "Cheer up!" Instead, focus on showing that you respect the pain they're in. You may say such things as,

- You may not believe it now, but the way you're feeling will change.
- Have you felt this way before? What helped change things for the better?
- I may not be able to understand exactly how you feel, but I want to help you.

Preventing a suicide is urgent. You should contact mental health professionals as soon as you can. Staying with the person can keep them from harming themselves; if possible, do not leave the person alone. Treat them with respect, physically and emotionally, so that their condition doesn't worsen before they can get help.