



Suicidal Employees: What Do You Do?

What should you do when an employee tells you they want to die or kill themselves and they're at work or calling in to work? Suicide can be a tough topic to think about and discuss, especially in the workplace, but it's important to have the conversation. Whether you are struggling yourself, are concerned about someone, or just want to be better equipped to support employees and team members, it's important to offer hope, help, and know where to go to get support.

Suicide is a leading cause of death among working-age adults in the U.S. and affects all of us across age, race, culture, ethnicity, socioeconomic level, etc. Contrary to popular belief, more than half of people who died by suicide did not have a known mental health condition. Beyond depression, anxiety, and substance use disorders, environmental contributors can also drive suicidal despair. These factors include workplace bullying and discrimination, relationships, physical health issues, and financial, legal, or housing stress. For managers and supervisors, this means a broad approach to the mobilization of appropriate resources, such as the Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

Warning Signs of Suicide

Recognizing the warning signs of suicide can be crucial in helping someone who may be at risk. If you notice any of these signs in yourself or someone else, it's important to take them seriously and seek help immediately. Reach out to your EAP or the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline for guidance and support. Remember that you don't have to go through this alone, and there are people and resources available to help. While not everyone displays the same signs, some common warning signs may include:

- Expressing suicidal thoughts or feelings, either directly or indirectly.
- Talking about feeling trapped, in unbearable pain, or being a burden to others.
- Social withdrawal and isolation from coworkers or increased interpersonal conflict at work.
- Deterioration of work performance and reduced productivity.
- Drastic changes in mood or behavior.
- Giving away personal belongings or making final arrangements.
- Increased use of alcohol or drugs.
- Preoccupation with death, dying, or self-harm.
- A sudden sense of calm or relief after a period of depression or moodiness, which may indicate that the person has made a decision to attempt suicide.
- Increased risk-taking behavior, such as reckless driving or drug abuse.
- Talking about feeling hopeless or having no reason to live.
- Drastic changes in sleep patterns, appetite, weight, hygiene, or appearance.
- Seeking access to means of self-harm, such as firearms or medications.
- A pattern of absenteeism, presenteeism, or coming in late or leaving early.

Some of these signs are obvious and might set off alarm bells immediately; others are more subtle. But it is important to notice and to act.

Suicide warning signs often exhibit a cluster of behaviors that are uncharacteristic of the person over a period of time. Many are similar in nature, but the reasons behind them may vary. That is why it's important to pay attention and check in with your employees on a regular basis.

Call 988 for in-the moment support for suicidal, mental health, or a substance abuse crisis. If you or someone you know are in *immediate* danger of acting on suicidal thoughts, call 911.

Having the Conversation about Suicide

Having the conversation with an employee about suicide is a sensitive and delicate matter. It's important to approach the topic with empathy, compassion, and a genuine concern for their well-being. Arrange for a private meeting where you can express your concern. Ask open-ended questions and encourage them to share their feelings. You could say things like, "You haven't seemed yourself lately and I'm worried about you. Is everything okay?" or "I've noticed that you've been doing (x, y, z) lately and I'm wondering how you're doing?"

Listen actively and pay close attention to what they say. Show empathy by nodding, maintaining eye contact, and using affirming statements like, "I understand this must be really difficult for you." Be patient and give them time to open up at their own pace. Some individuals may find it challenging to talk about their struggles, so don't rush the conversation. Remember, your role is to listen and provide emotional support, not to solve their problems. Avoid offering immediate solutions or advice.

If you believe the situation warrants it, you can gently ask if they have been having thoughts of self-harm or suicide. For example, "I need to ask a difficult question, but it's important: have you been thinking about hurting yourself or suicide?"

If they admit to having suicidal thoughts or feelings, reassure them that help is available and that they don't have to go through this alone. Encourage professional help through the EAP. Let them know that you are there to support them throughout their journey toward recovery. Offer to help them find resources and provide any workplace accommodations they may need. Follow up by checking in with them regularly to see how they're doing and whether they've taken any steps to seek help. Continue to offer your support and encouragement.

As a manager or supervisor, it's crucial to get the support that you need too. If you're concerned about an employee who may be suicidal, call the EAP and ask to speak to an Account Manager. An Account Manager can offer guidance and support on suicidal employees. They can also help provide resources for you or to pass along to the employee.

Supporting Employees

- Foster a culture prioritizing health and safety.
- Maintain regular communication with your employees.
- Be alert to changes in your employees.
- Address concerns promptly and directly.
- Act on concerns raised by others within the organization.
- Cultivate a workplace of belonging and respect.
- Equate physical and mental health to reduce stigma.
- Familiarize yourself with, utilize, and promote the EAP and other mental health resources.

Help Is Available

- **Call 911** if you or someone you know are in *immediate* danger of acting on suicidal thoughts.
- Call the **988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline** by dialing **988** or **800-273-8255**. The 988 hotline offers in-the-moment support for suicidal, mental health, and substance abuse crises, provides resources for further support, and links to 911 in cases where someone is in imminent danger. The hotline is also available to those who need guidance in how to support someone else experiencing suicidal distress.
- Chat or text **HOME** to **741741** through the **Crisis Text Line**.
- Connect with **IMALIVE**.
- **Contact the EAP** if you or someone you know has been impacted by suicide. Visit your member portal for more information and resources.

This information is not intended to replace professional care. Please call your EAP if professional care is needed. The EAP offers assessment, counseling, and referral to appropriate resources.