

When Kids Tell You They Want to Commit Suicide

Believe you can help! Most suicidal people don't tell professional counselors. They tell their friends or people they trust. If you're privileged to be that friend, you might think to yourself: "Thanks a lot! Just what I need! Why don't you tell someone who can help you?" (You'd never dare verbalize those thoughts, but you've felt those feelings.) Most of the time you're really saying, "I'm terrified. I don't want to do or say anything that might push you over the edge or balance the scale in the wrong direction."

You're scared because you care. But you forget your friends aren't asking you to be clinical with them. They want someone to come alongside and understand. That requires friendship skills and a willingness to risk getting involved—not a degree in counseling.

However, your primary responsibility is to preserve life. If someone is at high risk, get help immediately. Here's a way to find out the risk-level of someone who comes to you.

A number of suicide intervention programs across the country use a method of assessing the degree of risk called SLAP!

Find out:

Seriousness of Intent—Take every cry for help seriously. It's important to discover as quickly as possible how lethal (intent on dying) the person is. Is she experiencing so much pain she could easily make a serious attempt in a moment's notice?

Ask these helpful questions:

- Have you ever thought of killing yourself before?
- How often do you think about it?
- Have you ever tried? When? How?
- Have you thought of how you might do it this time? (It's fair to assume the more detailed the plan, the higher the risk involved.)