



CRISIS SUPPORT SERVICES

of Alameda County

SUICIDE PREVENTION & INTERVENTION 101

CRISTINA RITA, MA

AGENDA

WHAT WE ARE GOING TO LEARN ?

De-escalation

What is suicide prevention

#BeThe1to

Self-care



CRISIS DE-ESCALATION

10 TIPS FOR HELPING

1. Empathy And Being Non-judgmental: The use of empathy and not being judgmental are key ways to let the person know you are there to support them. An empathic statement can be, *"I don't even know what to say right now but I'm glad you told me."*
2. Personal Space: If possible stand 1.5 to three feet away from the person. If you have to enter someone's personal space to provide care, explain your action. This will help the person feel less confused and frightened.
3. Use Nonthreatening Nonverbal's: Be mindful of your gestures, facial expressions, movements, and tone of voice. Keep your tone and body language neutral. This will go a long way toward defusing the situation.
4. Avoid Overreacting: Remain calm, rational, and professional. You cannot control the persons behavior. How you respond to their behavior will have a direct effect on whether the situation escalates or defuses.
5. Focus on Feelings: How a person feels is the heart of the matter. Watch and listen carefully for the persons real message. Supportive words like, *"This must be scary."* Will let the person know that you understand what's happening.

CRISIS PREVENTION INSTITUTE, INC. (2016). CPI'S TOP 10 DE-ESCALATION TIPS RETRIEVED MARCH 24, 2023 FROM: [HTTP://CRISISPREVENTION.COM](http://CRISISPREVENTION.COM)

CRISIS DE-ESCALATION, CONT.

10 TIPS FOR HELPING

6. Ignore Challenging Questions: Answering challenging questions often results in a power struggle. Ignore the challenge, but not the person. Redirect the challenge to the situation right now and how you can collaborate to solve the problem. You might say, *"Let's focus on what is happening right now."*
7. Set Limits: When a person's behavior is belligerent, defensive, or disruptive, give them clear, simple, and enforceable limits. Offer concise and respectful choices. Be clear, speak simply, and offer positive choices first. *"I understand you are upset right now but it's not okay to speak to me like that. Can you take a breath and then let's continue our conversation."*
8. Choose Wisely What You Insist Upon: Offer a person options and flexibility. *"Keeping you safe is important. Who can we call to help support you or if there is no one you can think of are you willing to go to the hospital?"*
9. Silence: Silence allows time for reflections on what has been said for both of you. It's okay to pause and be quiet. Silence can be a powerful communication tool.
10. Allow Time For Decisions: In a crisis a person may not be able to think clearly. Give the person time to reflect and make a decision that is best for them.

CRISIS PREVENTION INSTITUTE, INC. (2016). CPI'S TOP 10 DE-ESCALATION TIPS RETRIEVED MARCH 24, 2023 FROM: [HTTP://CRISISPREVENTION.COM](http://CRISISPREVENTION.COM)

VIGNETTE: MARY

CRISIS SITUATION

Mary is a client you have been working with for several months. Mary is quiet, shy, and soft spoken. Mary takes great pleasure in having a neat and inviting home and is always neatly dressed for your visits.

Over that last few weeks you have noticed that Mary seems distant, and their appearance has changed. They appear sullen, tired, and agitated. Mary's house is messy. Mary appears unkempt and has not showered or changed clothes in several days.

Over the last few visits it has been hard to engage Mary. When asked questions Mary doesn't respond or responds in an angry, combative tone of voice.

Today you are meeting with Mary. When you arrive Mary is agitated and pacing. You notice the house is dirty, dishes are stacked in the sink, mail is stacked up on the table, the floors are littered with debris. Mary is wearing the same clothes they had on last week. Mary will not sit down and keeps pacing.

You try to engage with Mary but they seem not to hear you.

You are worried.

What de-escalation techniques might work in this situation?

SUICIDE

EVERYONE HAS A ROLE TO PLAY IN SUICIDE PREVENTION!



WHAT IS SUICIDE PREVENTION?

SUICIDE PREVENTION IS:

- Stable housing, financial security, access to healthy food.
- Creating safe environments by removing or limiting access to the lethal means of suicide. Access to mental health and substance use treatment.
- Advocating for supportive policies from political officials including jails, schools, and the health care system.
- Equitable access to health care. Provide therapeutic approaches that are culturally appropriate.
- Promote healthy connection with peers and community.
- Teach coping and problem solving skills. Teach parenting skills.
- Identify and support people at risk by training communities in suicide intervention, plan for safety and follow-up, know the resources available in the community.
- Encourage and use non stigmatizing messaging about suicide in the media and in our communities.

CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL. STRATEGIES TO PREVENTION SUICIDE. RETRIEVED MARCH 24, 2023 FROM: <https://www.cdc.gov>

RISK FACTORS FOR SUICIDE

THERE ARE MANY RISK FACTORS THAT CAN CONTRIBUTE TO SUICIDE HERE ARE A FEW OF THEM

Death or terminal illness of family member or friend

Divorce, separation or loss of a relationship

Loss of health

Trauma

Loss of job, home, money, status, self-esteem or personal security

Substance use

Pervious suicide attempt

Mental illness

KNOW THE WARNING SIGNS

Warning signs help you determine if a person is at risk for suicide, especially if the behavior is new, has increased, or seems related to a painful event, loss or change.

COMMON SUICIDE WARNING SIGNS

- Talking about wanting to die or to kill themselves.
- Looking for a way to kill themselves, like searching online or buying a gun.
- Talking about feeling hopeless or having no reason to live.
- Talking about feeling trapped or are in unbearable pain.
- Talking about being a burden to family, friends or community.
- Increasing the use of alcohol or drugs.
- Acting anxious or agitated; behaving recklessly.
- Sleeping too little or too much.
- Withdrawing or isolating themselves.
- Showing rage or talking about seeking revenge.
- Extreme mood swings.

#BETHE1TO

HELPING SOMEONE AT RISK FOR SUICIDE

1. Ask
2. Be There
3. Help Keep Them Safe
4. Help Them Connect
5. Follow-up





STEP #1

ASK

Asking the question:

“Are you thinking about taking your life?”

Communicates that you are open to speaking about suicide in a non-judgmental and supportive way.

You will not make someone suicidal by asking about suicide!



OTHER WAYS TO ASK ABOUT SUICIDE

YOUR WAY IS THE BEST WAY TO ASK

“Have you been thinking about taking your life?”

“Do you want to kill yourself?”

“Have you ever felt so ashamed that you wanted to disappear?”

“How do you hurt?”

“How can I help?”

“When someone is going through so much they may have thoughts of suicide. Are you thinking about suicide?”

STEP #2

BE THERE

This can mean being physically present for someone, speaking with them on the phone when you can, or any other way that shows support for the person at risk.

It is important in this step that you follow through with the way in which you say you'll be able to support the person. It's okay to say *“I can come you see you once a week but I can't see you every day.”*

Do not commit to anything you are not willing or able to accomplish.



BE THERE

Listening is very important during this step. Listen more and talk less.

Find out who and what they believe will be the most effective sources of help. They are the expert in their lives. You are the resource.

Help them identify people who might be able to help during a crisis.

Being present for someone at risk can increase feelings of connection and can help to save someone's life.

STEP #3

KEEPING THEM SAFE

Once you know suicide is being talked about it is important to keep the person safe.

To determine level of suicide risk the helper will need to ask clarifying questions.



Photo by Alicia Cai on Unsplash

SUICIDE RISK QUESTIONS

THESE QUESTIONS CAN HELP DETERMINE THE RISK FOR SUICIDE

“Have you done anything to try to take your life before speaking with me today?” If yes: “What did you do? When?”

“Do you know how you would take your life?” Ask for specifics. The more detailed the plan the more at risk they are.

“How often do you think about taking your life? How long do the thoughts of suicide last? Minutes? Days? Hours?”

“When do you plan on taking your life? Today? Tomorrow? A future date?”

“You said you are going to use a gun to end your life. Do you have access to the gun and ammunition?”
“Are you willing to give the gun to someone to keep until the crisis is over?”

“We have talked about why you want to die. Now let’s talk about why you want to live.”

RISK ASSESSMENT

HOW TO DETERMINE RISK OF SUICIDE

Asking the questions and getting the answers can help us determine the level of danger the person is at.

The more steps and pieces of the plan that are in place, the higher the risk of acting on the plan. A detailed plan makes it easier to enact the plan.

When a person has access to the means for suicide it is important to have a conversation about removing the means. This is a life saving intervention.

It can be difficult to determine suicide risk. It often is your judgment and your relationship with the person at risk that will predict your next steps.

Calling 988 (The Crisis and Suicide Lifeline) can help you figure out what the next steps are. We are always available for consultation in situations like this.

The next slide is a lethality scale that we use at Crisis Support Services of Alameda County. Let’s review it.

Lethality Scale



STEP 4

HELP THEM CONNECT

Helping someone connect to ongoing supports can help them establish a safety net for when thoughts of suicide come up for them.

These supports can be family, community, religious or spiritual activities, mental health professionals, 988 Crisis and Suicide Lifeline, friends, and anyone else the person feels can be helpful.



Photo by [Anthony Tran](#) on [Unsplash](#)

SAFETY PLAN

HELPING THEM CONNECT

A safety plan is a way to help the at risk person find ways to connect.

A safety plan is a collaboration between the at risk person and the helper to keep the at risk person safe when they experience thoughts of suicide.

A safety plan can help identify when the person is in distress by recognizing their own warning signs, know what coping skills might help, people to contact when they are feeling suicidal, places they can go to connect (library, Starbucks, friends), calling 988 Crisis and Suicide Lifeline, and talking about when they might need to go to the hospital for support.

A template of a safety plan is included in your handouts.

STEP 5

FOLLOW UP

After your initial contact with the person at risk for suicide, and after you have helped them connect with support systems, make sure you follow up with them to see how they are doing.

This contact can help the at risk person feel more connected.

You can contact the person by phone, in-person, email, text, snail mail or any other way you find that works for both of you.



Photo by Cytom Photography on Unsplash

VIGNETTE: MARY

WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

After your last contact with Mary you find out they had several risk factors in their life. They had a death in the family, struggling with finances, and the loss of a relationship.

Mary called you this morning and left a brief message saying, "I wanted to thank you for all your help last week. I am not sure how much more I can take. I feel lost but I wanted to thank you for your support." You feel unsettled by this message and decide to go over and check on Mary.

It takes Mary sometime before they answer the door. They are still in the same clothes and haven't showered. Mary lets you in the house. You ask about the message. Mary shrugs their shoulders but says nothing.

You notice on the table there is an empty bottle of pills. Finally Mary says, "I can't do this anymore." They put their head in their hands and are crying softly.

Using what we have talked about and your experiences what steps would you take?

THE PRACTICE OF SELF-CARE

WHAT DO YOU DO TO TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF?

Responding to someone who is suicidal is hard and will often bring up tender emotions.

Self-care is an important skill set in the work of a helper.

In the chat:

What do you do for self-care after a challenging experience?



QUESTIONS?



CRISIS SUPPORT SERVICES
of Alameda County

Contact Information

Mercedes Coleman
Director Community Education
Email: mcoleman@crisissupport.org

Cristina Rita
Community Training Manager
Email: crita@crisissupport.org
Phone: 510-557-1623