

F.A.C.T. Suicide Warning Signs

Warning signs are observable or behavioral indicators that someone is considering suicide. The acronym FACT can help a clinician or a concerned person note that suicide risk could be imminent. Warning signs are more serious than risk factors and suggest that someone may be or very likely is in acute risk. Acute risk requires a more immediate response, safety planning and immediate care.

F for Feelings

Hopelessness “It will never get any better.” “There’s nothing anyone can do.” “I’ll always feel this way.”

Fear of losing control, fear of going crazy, fear of harming oneself or others.

Helplessness, worthlessness, a feeling that “no one cares,” “everyone would be better off without me.”

Overwhelming guilt, shame, self-hatred.

Pervasive sadness

A for Actions or Events

Drug or alcohol abuse

Themes of death or destruction in talk or written materials (letters, notes)

Nightmares

Recent losses such as death, divorce, end of relationship, separation, loss of job, money, status, pride, self-esteem.

Loss of religious faith or spirituality

Agitation, restlessness

Aggression, recklessness

C for Change

In personality: more withdrawn, tired, apathetic, indecisive or more boisterous, talkative, outgoing. Different temperament than usual.

In behavior: Can’t concentrate on schoolwork, routine tasks, etc.

In sleep patterns: oversleeping, excessive sleeping, insomnia

In eating habits: loss of appetite and weight gain/loss, overeating, change in eating rituals

Loss of interest in friends, hobbies, personal grooming, sex or other activities previously enjoyed

Sudden improvement after a period of being down or withdrawn, “too euphoric”

T for Threats

Statements, e.g., “How long does it take to bleed to death?”

Threats, e.g., “I won’t be around much longer.”

Plans, e.g., putting affairs in order, giving away favorite things, studying the effects of drugs or medications, obtaining a weapon.

Gestures, or attempts, e.g., overdose, wrist cutting.

If you see one or more of these signs, it is very important that you ask the person if they are having thoughts of suicide. If you have been trained in QPR (Question, Persuade, Refer), you should provide QPR to the individual. Ask the question, without judgment, and engage the person about whom you are worried in getting help as soon as possible.