

Understanding Suicide Factors and Helping Bereaved Loved Ones

There are so many factors that figure into someone committing suicide that it can be impossible for bereaved loved ones to understand what has happened and the reasons for it. If you are trying to help a friend and support them after losing a loved one to suicide, it is important for you to understand the external factors that lead to suicide.

External factors that contribute to suicide

There are several [risk factors](#) that contribute to suicidal thoughts and actions. People who commit suicide often have a history of substance abuse, incarceration, a family history of



suicide, poor job security or low levels of job satisfaction, a history of abuse or witnessing continuous abuse, a diagnosis of a serious medical condition like cancer or HIV, a history of social isolation or being the victim of bullying, or being exposed to suicidal behavior. There also are certain groups of people who are at higher risk for suicide, including men, people over age 45, and Caucasians, American Indians, or Alaskan Natives.

Because people cannot control these external factors, it is imperative that you stress the fact that your friend is in no way to blame for the loss of her loved one. Help her understand that she is not responsible for the death of her loved one so that she can work through her grief in a healthy way.

Mental health factors into suicide

Certain mental disorders, mental illnesses, and [mental health issues](#) may increase the risk of suicide in people. Specifically, depression, bipolar disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and schizophrenia may increase the risk of suicidal behavior in people.

[Depression](#) is a common mental health issue around the globe; the World Health Organization estimates that 121 people suffer from depression today. Studies also show that mood disorders, including depression, are the most common psychiatric conditions that relate to suicide, though the risk of suicide greatly varies with the type of depression. Key indicators for suicide among those with depression include previous self-harm, the severity of illness, alcohol or drug abuse, serious or chronic physical illness, loneliness, anxiety, and personality disorders.

[Bipolar disorder](#) is another common condition that increases suicide risk; in fact, suicide risk is 15 times higher for people with bipolar disorder than in the general population.

Studies show that people with bipolar disorder attempt suicide less often when they commit to maintenance drug treatment and treatment for depression and avoid alcohol and drugs.

People who suffer from [schizophrenia](#) attempt suicide 40% of the time, and the most common cause of death among those with schizophrenia is suicide. Risk factors for suicide among people with this mental illness increase when they also suffer from depression, lack treatment, or have a chronic illness.

Again, you need to help your friend understand the relationship between mental health and suicide. While the facts and statistics may not be as meaningful to her in her grief, it is important for her to understand that the suicide was beyond her control.

Substance abuse factors and suicide

Substance abuse also plays a role in suicide and understanding the connection between the two may help your friend realize that she is not to blame for the suicide of her loved one. A mental health condition combined with addiction increases the risk of suicidal thoughts and behaviors. [Veterans](#) especially are at risk of substance abuse and suicide.

Your bereaved friend may or may not have been aware of substance abuse issues with her loved one while he was alive, and this may be a sensitive issue. In order to help her, you need to be supportive and empathetic. Do not judge her or her deceased loved one and listen to her when she needs to talk.

While you may not be able to understand exactly how your friend is feeling about losing a loved one to suicide, you can help her try to understand what happened and why. She needs to know that she is not to blame and is in no way responsible for the suicide. Offer to listen, talk, go for a walk, see a movie, or anything else that will help your friend process her grief and get through this incredibly difficult time.

Jennifer McGregor is a pre-med student, who loves providing reliable health and medical resources for [PublicHealthLibrary.org](#) users. She knows how difficult it can be to sift through the mountains of health-related information on the web. She co-created the site with a friend as a way to push reputable information on health topics to the forefront, making them easier and quicker to find.

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