



# Suicide Awareness and Supporting Others

What behaviors would you imagine noticing in a friend who is considering suicide? How do you think you would confirm those concerns, and do you believe you'd be comfortable talking with them about suicide and what support options are available?

Taking time to educate yourself on the warning signs of suicide and learning strategies to begin a conversation about suicide with someone you are concerned about can help save lives. It will also help you become more comfortable speaking about a topic that can illicit feelings of concern, discomfort, and fear.

Those feelings are uncomfortable. However, studies have shown that speaking openly about suicide and asking directly if someone is considering suicide are useful preventative measures. To begin, let's dispel one of the most common myths regarding suicide.

## **Would Discussing Suicide With Someone Put The Idea In Their Mind?**

No!

While this misconception is common, research has shown that asking someone about suicide will NOT put the idea in someone's mind.<sup>1</sup> This is an important concept to understand, because willingness to discuss suicide with someone you are concerned about is the most critical component to offering support.



## Warning Signs of Suicide

### How Would I Know if Someone Might Be Considering Suicide?

Before asking someone about suicide, you might be wondering what signs to look for that would indicate someone is contemplating suicide. According to the American Association of Suicidology, it's recommended that people showing warning signs such as the following receive emergency mental healthcare:

- Talking or writing about death, dying, or suicide, especially if this is unusual or related to a personal crisis or loss
- Seeking ways to kill themselves (for example, collecting pills or making plans to purchase a weapon during a crisis)
- Directly or indirectly threatening suicide, like:
  - Direct: "I'm going to kill myself"
  - Indirect: "I can't do this anymore" or "No one would miss me if I was gone"
- Warning signs that mean we need more information about a person's suicide risk:
  - Dramatic mood changes and exhibiting signs and language of hopelessness
  - Acting reckless or engaging in risky activities, seemingly without thinking
  - Withdrawing from friends, family, or society
  - Conveying no reason for living; no sense of purpose in life
  - Rage, anger, seeking revenge
  - Feeling trapped - as if there's no way out
  - Increasing alcohol or drug use
  - Anxiety, agitation, inability to sleep, or sleeping all the time



## Asking About Suicide

### Steps to Speak with Someone About Concerns of Suicide

If you've noticed warning signs of suicide and want to speak to the person it's possible you may be at a loss for how to proceed with the conversation. It's helpful to remember four basic steps:

**Ask** --> **Listen** --> **Affirm** --> **Resource**

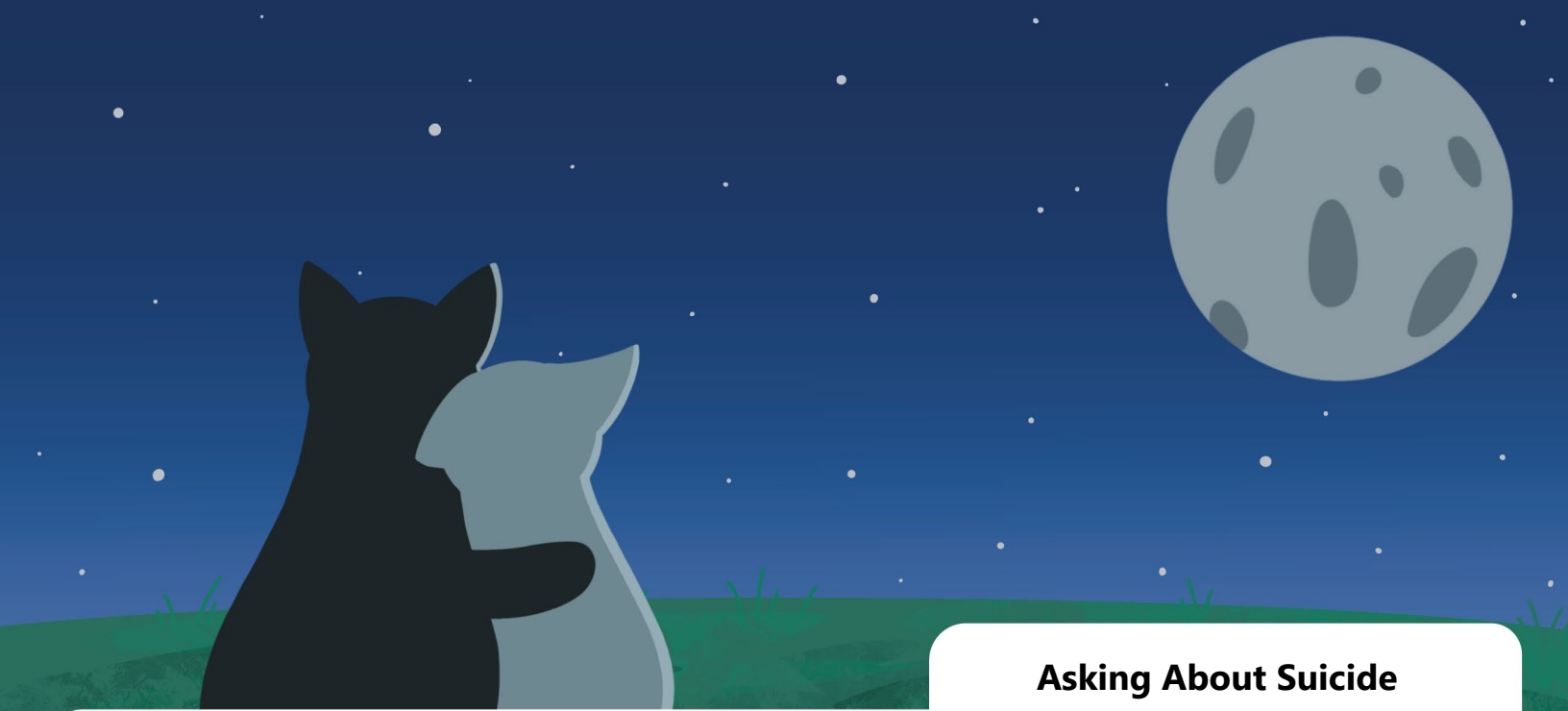
Let's go through each of these steps individually.

#### Ask

Remember, asking someone about suicide will not plant the idea in their mind. Asking directly does offer the person a natural opportunity to voice their thoughts, however. And asking someone who is not currently contemplating could open dialogue for them to discuss other concerns they might need support with. Consider this example method of asking:

*"Hi. I wanted to reach out because I know things have been challenging. I'm sorry to hear what you've been going through, even what I don't see. Can I ask, are you thinking about suicide? I'm here to listen."*

Next, let's break down what makes this method helpful and why.



## Asking About Suicide

*"I wanted to reach out because I know things have been challenging."*

This opening subtly conveys empathy and shows the person you observe their experience.

*"I'm sorry to hear what you've been going through, even what I don't see."*

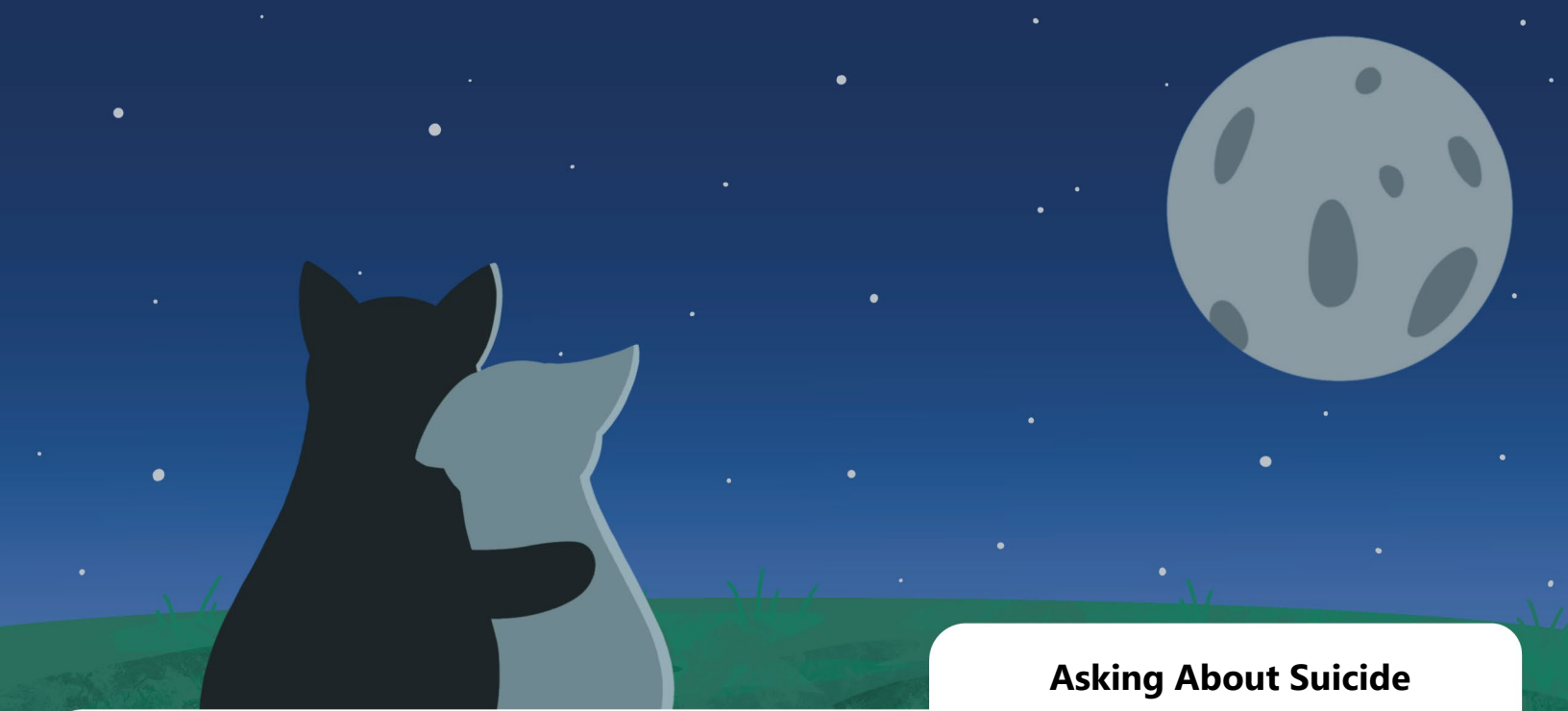
This conveys to someone that you have compassion for them and that you are not assuming you know everything about their situation.

*"Can I ask, are you thinking about suicide? I'm here to listen."*

This is a welcome to the person to speak about their thoughts, whether they are contemplating suicide or not.

### Listen

Let your friend speak and focus on asking questions that develop your understanding of what they're thinking and feeling, not solving their problems. Keep an ear out for warning signs of suicidal ideation or planning. Good questions to ask are, *"How long have you been feeling like this?"* and *"Have you thought about how you might commit suicide?"*



## Asking About Suicide

### Affirm

Often a suicidal person is certain that no one understands how desperate they feel. They can also feel like a burden to their loved ones. By demonstrating your empathy for them through affirmation they may feel less isolated and experience the possibility that others can be helpful. Remember, you aren't trying to be the solution to all their concerns, but rather an element of support towards resources.

*"Thank you for being open with me. It means a lot that you trust me with your feelings. Have you thought about talking to anyone else about how you're feeling?"*

### Resource

There is no one answer for people contemplating suicide, and you should not be expected to ever have all the answers. Resources on and off-campus can assist with the person's care, and providing the person direction to those resources can be a significant help if they are feeling overwhelmed and not sure where to begin.

*"I know that CAPS offers Urgent Care Hours, to help students in mental health distress. They're in PAVL 120 and have helped other students thinking about suicide. I can walk over there with you too, if you'd like."*



## How Else to Offer Support

Offer to help them connect to a support system, whether it's an on-campus office, family, friends, a mentor, or health care professional, so that they know they have a network to reach out to for help.

**Remember, call 911 immediately if the person is in life-threatening danger.**

If the person has a plan of how or when to act on their thoughts of suicide, ask them if you can call the **988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline** or the **Crisis Connections Lifeline** to get them connected to a crisis responder immediately (*these numbers and additional resources listed under the **Off-Campus Resources** section*).

### How Else Can I Support Someone Contemplating Suicide?

If someone you speak to confirms they are considering suicide, there are several ways that you can continue to support them:

#### Help Keep Them Safe

Asking the person if they've thought about how they would commit suicide or what access they have to medications, firearms, or other means of suicide is an important tool to keeping them safe.<sup>2</sup> Separate the person from anything they could use to hurt themselves:



## Help Keep Them Safe

### **Medications:**

Offer to hold onto and lock up all medications in the household. Provide only what is prescribed to the person as they need it. If someone in the home is taking opioids, be sure to have naloxone on hand.

### **Firearms:**

The lethality rate of firearm suicide attempts is very high, so it's important to remove access to firearms if a person shares they have considered this method. While it may not be illegal for you to hold onto and lock up the person's firearm personally, it's much easier for the person and your own household to have a 3rd party serve as safe storage. In Washington state many police headquarters will offer this service, and you can view a full list of sites via the Washington State Safe Storage Map: [Visit the Washington State Safe Storage Map](#)

### **Sharp Objects, Belts, and Ropes:**

These common items can post significant risk. Lock up or remove items such as knives, razors, belts, and ropes that a person could use to attempt suicide.

For more information on limiting access to objects and situations that could result in suicide, visit: [Visit AACAP Suicide Safety: Precautions at Home Guide](#)



## Help Keep Them Safe

In addition to removing items that could be used to attempt suicide, there are other steps that you can take to make an attempt more difficult:

### **Remove Alcohol:**

Alcohol can impair judgement and increase the risk of impulsive decisions such as suicide. Removing alcohol from the home helps alleviate this concern.

### **Disable Door Locks:**

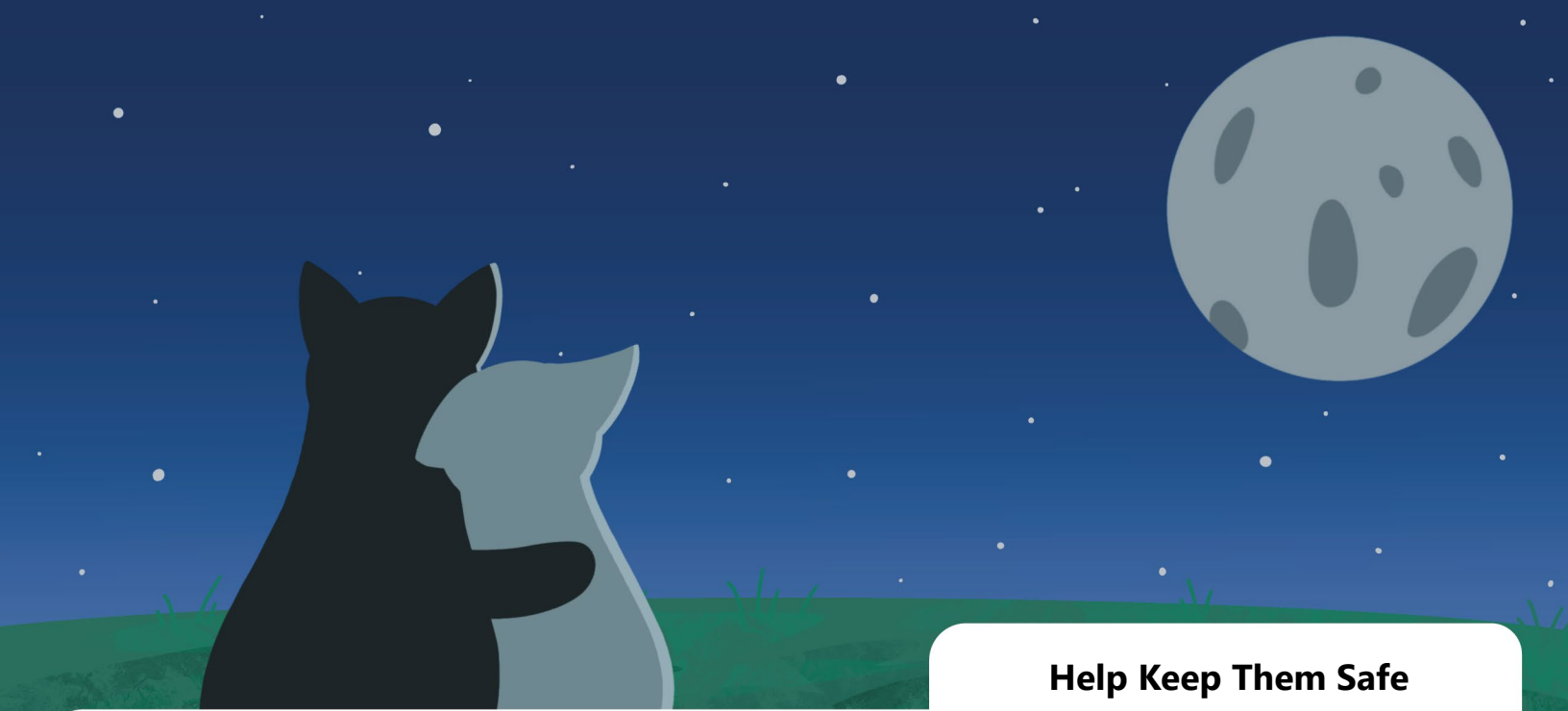
Disabling door locks makes it easier to check on a person if there is concern or emergency.

### **Request a Wellness Check:**

Call 911 if you are concerned a person is in danger and would like law enforcement to complete a wellness check, which could lead to hospitalization. Hospital emergency departments can offer suicide assessments, which could lead to hospitalization as well.

### **Follow-Up with the Person:**

Making contact with a person in the days and weeks after a crisis can make a difference in keeping them alive. Something as simple as a "caring contact", such as a phone call, text, or email, can make a big difference. Plan to check-in with the person you care about on a regular basis, either as a note to yourself or as specific plans with that person.



## Help Keep Them Safe

### What Can I Do If They Don't Want Help?

It can be difficult to know what to do when someone thinking about suicide doesn't want help. The most important things you can do are to be available for when they are ready to talk and create a safety plan.

As possible, reduce access to lethal means (see the Help Keep Them Safe section). You can also file an Extreme Risk Protection Order (ERPO). This prevents individuals at high risk of harming themselves or others from accessing firearms by allowing family, household members, and police to obtain a court order when there is demonstrated evidence that the person poses a significant danger.

**Remember, call 911 immediately if the person is in life-threatening danger.**

If the person has a plan of how or when to act on their thoughts of suicide, ask them if you can call the **988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline** or the **Crisis Connections Lifeline** to get them connected to a crisis responder immediately (numbers listed under Off-Campus Resources section, following page)



## Resources

### On-Campus Resources

- CAPS (Counseling and Psychological Services)
  - Office: Pavilion 120
  - Phone: 206-296-6090
- SU Department of Public Safety
  - 206-296-5911 (24hr Emergency); or
  - 206-296-5990 (24hr Non-Emergency)
- University Ministry
  - Office: Student Center 120
  - Phone: 206-296-6075
- Student Health Center
  - Office: Bellarmine 108
  - Phone: 206-296-6300
- Health and Wellness Crew
  - Office: Student Center 380
  - Phone: 206-220-8450

### Off-Campus Resources

- 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, 24-hour
  - Dial or text to 988
- King County Crisis Connections, 24-hour
  - 866-427-4747
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline
  - 1-800-273-8255 for assistance and resources
- Swedish First Hill Behavioral Health
  - 206-386-6000
  - Ask to speak with the social worker on duty about a person in crisis

### Sources

1 - [\*National Library of Medicine: "Does asking about suicide and related behaviors induce suicidal ideation? What is the evidence?"\*](#)

2 - [\*Prevent Youth Suicide: Remove or Lock Up Lethal Items at Home\*](#)