

Warning Signs of Suicide

There is no "typical" suicide victim. It happens to young and old, rich and poor. Fortunately there are some common warning signs. Here are some signs to look for:

- talks about committing suicide
- has trouble eating or sleeping (increase or decrease)
- experiences drastic changes in behavior
- withdraws from friends and / or social activities / social withdrawal / isolation
- loses interest in hobbies
- prepares for death by making out a will and final arrangements
- gives away prized possessions
- has attempted suicide before
- takes unnecessary risks
- has had recent severe loss
- is preoccupied with death and dying
- loses interest in personal appearance and / or personal hygiene
- makes statements such as "you'd be better off without me" or "maybe I won't be around anymore"
- expresses hopelessness and / or helplessness
- exhibits depression, extreme sadness and crying
- lack of interest in the future
- acts calm after deciding to commit suicide — has a sudden elevated mood
- has increasing difficulties relating to others
- speaks unrealistically about getting out of jail
- displays agitation / hostility / poor impulse control

Risk Factors for Suicide

The reasons for suicide are difficult to define. Some of the motives for self-destructive behavior include:

- first incarceration
- new sentencing
- extreme despair
- hopelessness, with no sense of the future
- major illness or AIDS test results
- humiliation
- loss of employment
- loss of a friendship
- death in the family
- guilt or shame over incarceration
- delusions
- incarceration (first 24 hours is a high risk period)
- loss of privileges
- confinement in segregation
- upcoming sentencing
- release from confinement
- depression
- substance abuse
- schizophrenia
- post-rape
- anniversary dates including incarceration
- holidays (seasonal syndrome)
- decreased supervision
- physical / sexual victimization
- parole denial
- crime of high notoriety
- recent transfer from one facility to another

Although the suicide prone prisoner is extremely unhappy, he / she is not necessarily mentally ill.