A Family Guide to Understanding Suicide
If your life has been touched by suicide you are likely feeling scared, concerned, angry and confused. All these emotions are normal. The SPCCH has created this guide to help you begin a dialogue with yourself and others about suicide. The guide covers basic information about suicide, statistics to help you understand how many people are affected, myths and facts about suicide that will arm you with the right information, warning signs, local training programs and Hamilton support services.
What is Suicide?

“Suicide is the triumph of pain, fear and loss over hope. Suicide is most often the result of pain, hopelessness and despair. It is almost always preventable through caring, compassion, commitment and community.”

– Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention

Suicide is not about wanting to die but rather not wanting to live. It is about escaping unbearable pain. Suicide is a means to end a situation in which an individual feels trapped.
Stats

- Worldwide we lose someone to suicide every 40 seconds; nearly one million people end their lives each year.
- In Canada there are approximately 4000 suicides annually.
- We lose someone to suicide every 9 days in Hamilton.

What is important to remember however is that these numbers are only the tip of the iceberg. It is estimated that 25% more suicides occur than are never reported, there are 40 times as many suicide attempts than completed suicides and that 1 out of 17 people in any two week period are having thoughts of suicide...that means 1,686,485 Canadians are actively thinking about suicide.

Of course the issue has a much larger effect as we look at family members, friends, colleagues and communities that can be affected when someone attempts or completes suicide.
Myth: Suicide is not common at all.
Fact: Worldwide someone dies by suicide every 40 seconds, more people die by suicide than by homicide or war. Approximately 4000 Canadians die by suicide every year. In Hamilton we lose someone to suicide every 9 days. It is estimated that statistics for suicide may be under reported by as much as 25%. Social, economic, cultural and religious values and practices contribute to the under reporting of suicide.

Myth: Only certain people are at risk of suicide.
Fact: Anyone can be at risk of suicide at some point in their life. Suicide knows no cultural, religious, education, age, social or economic boundaries. Males complete suicide at a higher rate than females but females attempt more frequently than males. Family history of suicide or familiarity with suicide can be a risk factor.
**Myth:** If they talk about suicide they won’t act on it so I don’t need to be worried.

**Fact:** Most people thinking about suicide will invite others to talk about it at some point and often with more than one person. Sadly we often miss, dismiss or avoid these opportunities to talk about suicide. Anyone thinking about suicide is at risk and needs a plan and resources in place to stay safe.

**Myth:** You should not talk about suicide with someone that you might think is at risk because it might encourage them to start thinking about suicide.

**Fact:** Serious talk about suicide does not create or increase risk, it reduces it! The best way to identify the risk of suicide is to ask directly and to offer support. Saying things like “don’t talk like that” or “it can’t be that bad” makes the individual feel alone and not understood, which could increase risk.

**Myth:** Suicidal behaviors are just attention seekers.

**Fact:** Any suicidal behavior requires attention. If help is not offered a person may conclude that help will never come increasing their risk of making a lethal attempt. Every indication of suicidal behavior is a cry for help which needs action.

**Myth:** If someone is considering suicide there is nothing I can do.

**Fact:** Being informed and alert will help us to engage and help those with thoughts of suicide. SafeTALK training is a 3.5 hr session that can help you to be alert to the signs that someone could be suffering with thoughts of suicide, teach you how to ask the question “Are you thinking of suicide?” and what resources are available locally that you can connect the person with. These resources will help the individual develop a plan to stay safe and get some help with the problems they are facing.
Warning Signs

Although there are potentially many warning signs, every person and situation is different. The key to understanding and being alert about suicide is to try to understand how the individual feels about their life and what their perception is of their current situation. The signs or clues that we received from individuals could be expressed directly or indirectly.

Here are some things to look for:

- Expressions of helplessness or hopelessness
- Social isolation or withdrawal from activities once enjoyed
- Preoccupation with death
- Preparing for death such as giving away possessions, saying goodbye, making a will
- Destructive or high risk behavior such as alcohol or drug abuse
- Loss of interest in relationships, work, school or appearance
- Statements such as “I just can't take it anymore”, “It won't matter soon”, “I might as well be dead”, “Nobody would miss me” or “You'd be better off without me”
- Ongoing sadness or depression
- Aggressive behavior
Suicide Alertness Program

safeTALK is a 3.5 hr LivingWorks program that teaches community members to recognize persons with thoughts of suicide and connect them to suicide first aid resources. Most people with thoughts of suicide, either directly or indirectly, invite help to stay safe. Alert helpers know how to identify and work with these opportunities to help and protect life. Powerful videos illustrate both non-alert and alert responses. Discussion and practice stimulate learning.

Learning Outcomes
By the end of the workshop, participants will be better able to:

- Move beyond the tendency to miss, dismiss or avoid suicide.
- Identify people who have thoughts of suicide.
- Apply the TALK steps (Tell, Ask, Listen and Keep safe) to connect a person with suicide thoughts to suicide first aid and intervention caregivers.

Who Can Attend
- This program is available to anyone over the age of 15 who might want to help.
Suicide Intervention Skills Program
Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training is a two day interactive Living Works workshop that prepares caregivers to provide suicide first aid interventions. Small group discussions and skills practice are based on adult learning principles. ASIST teaches the Pathways for Assisting Life Model a practical guide to doing suicide interventions. Powerful video support learning.

Learning Outcomes
By the end of the workshop, participants will be better able to:
- Identify people who have thoughts of suicide
- Understand how beliefs and attitudes can affect suicide interventions
- Seek a shared understanding of the reasons for suicide
- Support the individual to turn towards the option of safety for now
- Work to collaboratively build a safety framework for the person at risk
- Link people with community resources

Who Can Attend
- Persons concerned about family or friends
- Emergency service workers
- Counsellors, teachers and ministers
- Mental health professionals
- Workers in health, welfare or justice
- Community volunteers
Local Resources

If you or someone you know is having thoughts of suicide, please reach out.

Hamilton 24 Hour Help Lines

Crisis Outreach and Support Team COAST
905-972-8338

Barrett Centre for Crisis Support
905-529-7878

Suicide Crisis Line
905-522-1477

Telelcare Burlington
905-681-1488

In an emergency where an individual and/or others are at immediate risk of harm dial 911. For example, if a person is in the act of harming themselves or others or brandishing a knife/gun/weapon.
Other Resources

The following organizations can provide you with more information about mental health/addiction issues and available resources:

**Contact Hamilton** to find services for children and youth in Hamilton
905-570-8888 • www.contacthamilton.ca

**Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) Hamilton**
905-521-0090 • www.cmhahamilton.ca

**Centre de Sante Communautaire Hamilton**
905-528-0163 • www.cschn.ca

**Alcohol, Drug and Gambling Services Hamilton**
905-546-3606 • adgs@hamilton.ca

**Alternatives for Youth**
905-527-4469 • www.ay.on.ca

**DART – Drug and Alcohol Registry of Treatment**
1-800-565-8603 • www.dart.on.ca

**Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH)**
1-800-463-6273 • www.camh.net

**Moods Disorders Association of Ontario**
1-888-486-8236
www.mooddisorders.on.ca

**Rainbow Health Ontario**
416-324-4100
www.rainbowhealthontario.ca

**Schizophrenia Society of Ontario (Hamilton)**
905-523-7413
www.schizophrenia.on.ca/Events/Regional-Events/Hamilton-Niagara-Region

**Helpful Websites**

**www.spcch.org**
Suicide Prevention Community Council of Hamilton

**www.ospn.ca**
Ontario Suicide Prevention Network

**www.casp.ca**
Canadian Association of Suicide Prevention

**www.suicideinfo.ca**
Centre for Suicide Prevention