

The Role of Co-Workers in Preventing Suicide

Suspecting that a co-worker is considering ending his or her life can be frightening and confusing. You may not know when you should become involved in the problem of someone who is not a family member or close friend. You may be unsure of what you can really do to help someone with emotional difficulties or feel uncertain whether your co-worker is actually in serious trouble. Being wrong could be a little embarrassing. But being right could save a life. This handout will help you recognize and help co-workers who may be considering suicide.

Consider this scenario:

Marcus had worked with Linda for 3 years. While they did not socialize outside of work, they were friendly. Recently Marcus noticed that Linda had changed. Linda had always kept to herself but, lately, she seemed to avoid her co-workers as much as possible. She stopped eating in the break-room and ate by herself in her car. She also was becoming uncharacteristically abrupt with customers. On a number of occasions, Linda looked like she had been crying. But Marcus just did not feel comfortable asking Linda about this.

Instead, he asked Martha, another co-worker, if she thought anything was wrong with Linda. Martha seemed relieved that someone else had noticed and confirmed all of Marcus's observations. She also said that Linda had told her that she had been "really sad" and "just didn't know if she could go on." Marcus did not know what to do. He was concerned but was not sure if any of this was really his business.

The next day, he saw Linda crying in the supply room. He decided to tell the floor supervisor about Linda. The supervisor said that he would talk with Linda privately and tell her that some of her co-workers were concerned about her and remind Linda that she could talk to a counselor at the Employee Assistance Program about what was troubling her.

Suicide Warning Signs

People who are in danger of suicide often display warning signs. You may be in a good position to recognize these signs in the people with whom you work – even if they are trying to conceal their problems. You see co-workers on a regular basis and know how they talk, act, and react day in and day out in the workplace. You can recognize changes in their behavior, personality, or mood. Such changes may be a "cry for help." Signs that a suicidal crisis may be imminent include:

- Talking about suicide or death
- Making statements like, "I wish I were dead" or "I'm going to end it all"
- Less direct verbal cues, including "What's the point of living?" "Soon you won't have to worry about me" and "Who cares if I'm dead, anyway?"
- Uncharacteristically isolating themselves from others in the workplace
- Expressing feelings that life is meaningless or hopeless
- Giving away cherished possessions
- Neglect of appearance and hygiene
- Sudden, unexplained deterioration of work performance or productivity

There is no foolproof way of telling that someone may be thinking of suicide. But these warning signs can also indicate that a person has serious problems that affect his or her life, productivity, and the work environment. By recognizing and acting on these signs, you can help a co-worker find professional assistance and become healthier, happier, and more productive.

Make the Call!

USPS Employee Assistance Program
1-800-327-4968
(1-800-EAP-4-YOU) TTY: 1-877-492-7341
www.EAP4YOU.com