

Suicide and Serious Mental Illness

Serious mental illness does not cause suicide, but suicide is more common among consumers than in the general community. This is because mental illness is a major risk factor and it often exposes those it besets to other conditions that raise vulnerability. However, suicide can be prevented and it never has to happen.

About 5% of individuals with serious mental illness complete suicide. About 40% of all suicide victims had a serious mental illness at the time of death. About 6% of those with schizophrenia complete suicide during their lifetime. 10% of suicides involve a depressive disorder. Co-occurring mental illness and/or alcohol/drug use are common among suicide victims.

Key Risk Factors of Suicide for Those with Serious Mental Illness

- Early stage of illness
- After a psychiatric hospitalization
- Past attempt(s) or suicidal behavior
- Loss of a family member or friend to suicide
- Inadequate treatment/treatment reductions
- Anxiety, panic, personality disorder
- History of abuse, trauma, or violence
- Hopelessness/depressive episode

Important Protective Factors for Those with Serious Mental Illness

- Having a good support system
- Optimism, resilience, recovery, wellness
- No access to guns or unused medications
- Treatment adherence
- Willingness and ability to seek help
- Good problem-solving/coping skills

Reasons to Seek Help

- Feelings of emptiness or not belonging
- Feeling trapped/no way out/helpless
- Withdrawing from family, friends, supports
- Dramatic mood changes
- Rage, revenge, recklessness
- Using more alcohol or drug use
- Anxiety, agitation, sleep problems
- Having no reason to live, wanting to die

When to Call for Emergency Help 610-279-6100 (Suicide Hot Line or 9-1-1)

- If someone is threatening to hurt or kill herself or himself
- If someone is looking for ways to take her or his life (i.e., a gun, stockpiling pills,)
- If someone talking, writing, or drawing about death, dying, or suicide