

# 'Know the Signs' campaign aims to save lives

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**Amy Machin Ward**  
Special to the sun

## IF YOU NEED HELP

Nevada County Crisis line: 530-265-5811

Placer County Crisis line: 916-787-8860

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 800-273-TALK / 800-273-8255

TAHOE/TRUCKEE, Calif. — EDITOR'S NOTE: The Suicide Prevention Task Force will present a series of articles during the next few weeks about our community's commitment to the "Know the Signs" campaign and initiatives to help prevent youth suicide.

The Know the Signs campaign is part of statewide efforts to prevent suicide, reduce stigma and discrimination related to mental illness, and to promote the mental health and wellness of students.

These initiatives are funded by the Mental Health Services Act (Prop 63) and administered by the California Mental Health Services Authority (CalMHSA), an organization of county governments working to improve mental health outcomes for individuals, families and communities.

This campaign is intended to prepare Californians to prevent suicide by encouraging them to know suicide warning signs for suicide, find the words to offer help, and reach out to local resources.

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Our local Tahoe Truckee Youth Suicide Prevention Task Force has chosen this educational campaign as the main focus for our prevention strategies. We want our community to "Know the Signs," find the words and reach out to anyone struggling with thoughts of suicide, especially our youth.

Find out more at <http://www.SuicideisPreventable.org>.

## PAIN IS NOT ALWAYS OBVIOUS

The Know the Signs campaign is based on the following pillar: "Pain isn't always obvious." A common emotion among people feeling suicidal is pain, which isn't always evident to others. The warning signs can be subtle, but they are there.

Suicide is a complex issue and cannot be attributed to a single cause. Studies show people who know the signs and available resources are more likely to take action that could save a life.

While every suicide may not be prevented, suicide is preventable, and people with suicidal thoughts and feelings can be treated.

## THE FACTS

Suicide is not inevitable. Experts aren't the only ones who can help. Knowing the warning signs and how to reach out to someone in crisis gives anyone the power to make a difference. Mentioning suicide will not anger the person in crisis. People contemplating suicide are often relieved to have the subject raised in a caring way. It opens the door to have a frank conversation. Asking about suicide does not put the idea in someone's head.

The warning signs for suicide manifest themselves in different ways for different people. Some signs are more critical, and may indicate an imminent threat of suicide.

## THE SIGNS

The warning signs for suicide can be subtle, but someone experiencing emotional pain almost always shows some type of sign. Below are the signs of immediate crisis and concern. What should we do? Call 9-1-1, or seek immediate help when you hear or see any one of these behaviors:

Someone threatening to hurt or kill themselves

Someone looking for ways to kill themselves: seeking access to pills, weapons, or other means

Someone talking or writing about suicide, or about death and dying when this is out of the ordinary for them

If someone is showing any or a combination of the following behaviors, you or they can call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1 (800) 273-TALK (8255) or the Nevada County Crisis Line at 1-530-265-5811.

Talking about wanting to die or suicide

Increased drug or alcohol use

Anger

Feeling hopeless, desperate, trapped

No sense of purpose

Reckless behavior

Withdrawal

Anxiety or agitation

Changes in sleep

Putting affairs in order

Giving away possessions

Sudden mood changes

## **RISK FACTORS**

Risk factors are characteristics that contribute to the likelihood of suicide. Risk factors are based on statistics and may not apply to every suicidal individual. The most common ones are:

Prior suicide attempt

Easy access to lethal means (weapons, medications, etc)

Mental health condition like depression and/or substance abuse

Poor ability to tolerate and cope with negative emotions

They know someone close to them who died by suicide

## **START THE CONVERSATION**

The key is to know how to start a conversation. Be sure to have crisis resources on hand.

Step 1: Mention the signs that prompted you to be concerned. This makes it clear that you are not asking “out of the blue,” and makes it more difficult for the person to deny something is bothering them. Ask directly about suicide. “Are you thinking about suicide?” or “Are you thinking about ending your life?” Asking directly and using the word “suicide” establishes you and the person at risk are talking about the same thing and lets the person know you are willing to talk openly about suicide.

Step 2: Listen, express concern, provide reassurance. If they answer “yes” to your direct question about suicide, stay calm and don’t leave the person alone until further help is obtained. Listen to the reasons the person has for both living and dying. Validate they are considering both options and underscore living is an option for them. Let the person know you care. Letting them know you take their situation seriously, and you are genuinely concerned about them, will go a long way in your effort to support them.

Step 3: Create a Safety Plan. Ask the person if they have access to any lethal means (weapons, medications, etc.) and help remove them from the vicinity. (Another friend, family member or law enforcement agent may be needed to assist with this.) Do not put yourself in danger; if you are concerned about your own safety, call 9-1-1. Create a safety plan together. Ask the person what will keep them safe until they meet with a professional. Ask the person if they will refrain from using alcohol and other drugs or agree to have someone monitor their use. Get a verbal commitment that the person will not act upon thoughts of suicide until they have met with a professional.

Step 4: Get help. Provide the person with national or local resources. Call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline anytime at 1-800-273-8255. Local resources can be found at <http://www.SuicideisPreventable.org>.

#### DO NOT SAY ...

Don't ask in a way that indicates you want "No" for an answer. (For example, "You're not thinking about suicide, are you?" or "You're not thinking of doing anything stupid, are you?")

Don't tell the person to do it. You may want to shout in frustration or anger, but this is the most dangerous thing you can say.

Don't promise secrecy. The person may say they don't want you to tell anyone else they are suicidal. You may be concerned they will be upset with you, but when someone's life is at risk, it is more important to ensure their safety.

Amy Machin-Ward is the Tahoe Truckee Youth Suicide Prevention Task Force Coordinator, contact her at [tahoewards@gmail.com](mailto:tahoewards@gmail.com) if you would like to get involved, have questions or seek additional information.



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Now more than ever, your support is critical to help us keep our community informed about the evolving coronavirus pandemic and the impact it is having locally. Every contribution, however large or small, will make a difference.

Your donation will help us continue to cover COVID-19 and our other vital local news.

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I NEED VOLUNTEERS



I CAN VOLUNTEER

## Conversation

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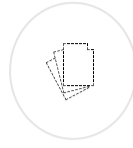


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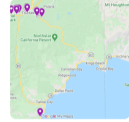
## Start The Conversation

### ACTIVE CONVERSATIONS



Climbers urged to stay home for now

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Special delivery: Area businesses providing pick-up, take-out, delivery service

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