What Do I Do Now?

January 2020

by Bob Swanson

You noticed your co-worker’s behavior has changed recently, and you have also noticed some concerning verbal statements and actions. These could be clues that your co-worker is having suicidal thoughts. What do you do now?

What would you do if that same co-worker was bleeding? You’d take action to assist them to help prevent their situation from getting worse. That same line of thinking needs to apply to someone having suicidal thoughts. Just because you can’t physically see the injury or illness does not mean it isn’t there or that it isn’t something you should take seriously. If you think someone is having suicidal thoughts, immediate action is required to prevent possible injury or death.

Here are the steps to take when you suspect someone is having suicidal thoughts:

- Create a safe place to talk alone.
- Discuss your concerns and your recent observations.
- Offer assurance that you are there for them.
- Ask open-ended questions.
- Allow them to speak freely.
- Be patient and listen without judgement.
- Ask them outright if they are having suicidal thoughts.
- Stress that you want to help, and tell them you don’t want them to die.
- Stay with them; don’t leave them alone.
- Remove any lethal means that may be available to them.
- Offer hope and help. “Are you ok working together to get some help?” You want their permission.

Throughout this process, you will need to assess the severity of the situation and what resources may be needed. At one level, assistance from the company’s employee assistance program (EAP) may be appropriate. In extreme situations, a 911 call may be necessary. If the individual confirms having suicidal thoughts, assistance from a mental health professional is necessary.

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There are several resources available to help:

• The company’s Employee Assistance Program phone number.
• National Suicide Crisis resources, which are staffed by mental health professionals on a 24/7 basis.
  - CALL: (800) 273-8255
  - TEXT: HOME 741741
  - VISIT: www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org
• The phone number of your local crisis center.

When in doubt, trust your instincts and take immediate action; you could save a life. Remember to follow up with your co-worker and stay in touch, just as you would with any injury situation.

For more information on this topic, Dr. Sally Spencer-Thomas put together an excellent blog on asking someone about suicide. Click here to read.

About the Author - Bob Swanson

Bob Swanson is the past president of Swanson & Youngdale and the first Chairman of FCA International. He tragically lost his son Michael to suicide on March 13, 2009 at the age of 33. Bob now focuses his efforts on creating awareness of the impact of mental health and suicide in the construction industry.

Find more of Bob’s blogs at:

www.finishingcontractors.org/preventsuicide