



Recognize Respond Refer

Supporting mental health and preventing suicide at UW

Overview of the Recognize, Respond, Refer Approach

Recognize

Most people experiencing suicidal thoughts show outward signs that may alert you that they are in distress. Although some individuals might not show any signs, it's important to watch for common warning signs.

Suicide Warning Signs

- Referencing or talking about suicide or a desire to not live anymore
- Out-of-character behavior, such as giving away possessions
- Lowered self-worth or confidence; feeling like a burden; feeling hopeless
- Not showing up for obligations; isolating
- Changes in mood
- Eating or sleeping more or less
- Relationship difficulties; recent breakup or falling out
- Less attention to personal hygiene
- Using alcohol or drugs more frequently

Respond

Once you are in a private, comfortable place, initiate a check-in:

- Name the specific warning signs you have recognized.
- Ask permission to check-in further.

Tips for Responding

- **Express concern directly and honestly.** It is more important to demonstrate that you care and to use active listening skills than to avoid a conversation. Name what you have recognized and ask to check in further.
- **Listen without judgment.** Listen with the intent to really understand what the other person is saying and feeling. Don't minimize or dismiss their experiences. Pauses and silence are okay.
- **Demonstrate empathy.** Thank them for sharing. Acknowledge their experiences and concerns as valid.
- **Offer hope.** Reassure that help is available and ask permission to share resources. Let them know their life is important to you.
- **Ask about suicide if you notice warning signs.** This shows that you are ready to listen to their feelings and open to support them. Asking directly about thoughts of suicide can also help you determine the urgency of the situation.
- **Reach out for help if necessary.** Do not be sworn to secrecy. You can always consult with your university crisis line or counseling center.

Refer

For referrals to be helpful, they should ideally:

- Be responsive to student needs, as understood by the student
- Be collaborative, not coercive
- Be responsive to student beliefs and identities