

FACING SUICIDE



Toolkit Article #3: Knowing How to Respond

KNOWING HOW TO RESPOND

While medical professionals and mental health practitioners can provide important ongoing support and treatment for people experiencing suicidal thoughts, friends and family members can also learn how to respond to emotional crises. Experts agree that simple steps can help save lives: asking if someone is suicidal, having a conversation with them to learn more if they say yes, listening with empathy, and then seeking mental health treatment. Never leave a person in crisis alone, they say. For a powerful example of help in a time of crisis, watch Dave's story of recovery.

If you are considering suicide or if you or someone you know is in emotional crisis, call or text 988 for confidential, free, crisis support.

During the farm crisis of the 1980s, farmer Dave Boettger experienced significant financial pressures, clinical depression, and other factors that led him to think seriously about taking his own life.

"This farm has been in our family for four generations," says Dave. "Farming, at least from my generation, was a lifestyle and you had failed if you lost the farm."

Fortunately for Dave, who feared he would lose his family's farm, help came in the form of his concerned wife Nancy and their neighbor Mike Rossman, who happens to be a psychologist with a specialty in farmer mental health. Nancy knew to call Mike, who acted immediately. He came to Dave's side and stayed with him through his emotional crisis – a window of time experts agree is critical for those at risk for suicide.

A suicidal crisis may be brief, sometimes lasting as little as ten minutes, says Dr. Sean Joe, Professor of Social Development at Washington University in St. Louis.

"It's not enough time to get to a doctor," adds Dr. Dan Reidenberg of Suicide Awareness Voices of Education (SAVE). "It's not enough time to get to a hospital. That means right now, it's you and me having a conversation and we're going to get through this until that impulsive feeling, that thought, that behavior that you want to engage in, goes away."

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Often, there are warning signs before a crisis; but if someone you are with is in crisis, having a caring conversation and the ability to take action can make all the difference.

Fortunately for Dave Boettger, Mike was able to stay with him until his crisis passed; then, they immediately sought help from mental health practitioners. After ongoing treatment in a mental health hospital, Dave started to improve. He now tells his story as a way to help farmers and others see hope when they experience mental health disorders or crises.

Experts agree that there are a few simple steps anyone can take to help someone through an emotional crisis:

- o Ask the person directly if they are considering suicide, and stay with them if they say yes
- o Listen with empathy
- o Create a safe environment by removing lethal means of suicide from the home
- o And get help from a medical professional

And, they say, never leave a person in crisis alone.

For more information about suicide and suicide prevention, watch the other videos in our series.

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