

Boundaries in Suicide Prevention

As our community becomes more vigilant in understanding warning signs for suicide, it has fallen into everyone's hands to connect others to much-needed help during times of distress or crisis. Nevertheless, with so much focus solely on prevention, the importance of openly discussing boundaries and safety while trying to help others in crisis must be at the forefront of this conversation. Being able to discern the difference between somebody who is genuinely asking for help while going through a suicidal crisis and somebody who may also be using suicide as a means of manipulation or control is a matter of safety. For example, if someone is trying to remove themselves from a conflict, situation, or relationship where they feel unsafe, they have every right to walk away from the conflict. Forcing a person to stay by threatening or omitting suicide or harm to others if they try to leave is manipulative. The suicidal person may need help, but it should not have to come at another person's expense. If suicide is ever used as a means of manipulating a person to stay in an unsafe situation, there is more than just one life at risk.

Research has shown that there is no such thing as a single reason for somebody to take their own life, but rather an intersection of multiple risk factors converging between their environment, health, and personal history at a specific point in time. Many people like to focus on single environmental factors within the time frame of a suicide—such as divorce or job loss—but a majority of people go through ups and downs in life and manage to work through them. Understanding that a single person or event cannot be the sole reason somebody chooses suicide empowers boundaries as well as healing in situations where blame, guilt, or harm may exist.

It should also be noted that when a victim in any domestic violence situation tries to separate from their partner, their life and their circumstances can be most volatile. Safety planning for alternative times to escape may be needed, especially if their partner is suicidal, has access to a firearm, has a history of violence, or if there are children involved. Getting help for a suicidal person can take place *away* from the victim. Crime Scene Cleaners respond to more murder-suicides in domestic violence situations than any other.

A person in crisis may also call somebody over the phone or send messages before attempting to end their life, and it can be panic-inducing to want to find where they are and head to their location. However, trying to de-escalate the situation from a distance while biding time for a crisis team or first responder to find them is a much safer means of helping. Showing up to an unfamiliar location, especially if it is late at night or if there is any indication they have a firearm, have consumed drugs or alcohol, or are in a secluded area (such as near train tracks, a bridge, or an abandoned building) is extremely dangerous, particularly if they are asking for the person to come alone.

As of January 1, Fresno County has its very own mobile Crisis Response team, capable of dispatching to mental health and substance use incidents 24/7. Their phone number is (559) 600-6000, and there is no cost to utilize this service. The Marjaree Mason Center domestic violence crisis line is also 24/7, and their phone number is (559) 233-4397. Suicide Prevention is important, but being able to discern whether or not you are in danger is just as important.

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