

# Compass

## Depression's link to suicide

When a person takes their own life, we are left to ask the question 'why?' One common reason is that the person was suffering from severe depression. It's important to be aware that the presence of severe depression can interfere with your ability to solve painful problems—putting you at risk for suicide.

From relationship breakups to financial or legal crises to having been bullied, many external factors can lead a person to consider suicide. However, it's the *internal* factors—how a person's emotions are impacted—that often make the difference. Suicide is usually the end result of a battle with depression. However, it's possible to not be aware that you're depressed, and the people around you may not recognize your need for help. These factors can keep you from getting the depression treatment you need. Effective care often includes therapy and/or medication.

In recognition of National Suicide Prevention Week (the second week of September), this *Compass* issue looks at how to identify depression and suicide risk. Topics include:

- How to identify the symptoms of depression.
- Ways to cope with suicidal thoughts.
- How to get help if you (or a friend or loved one) are at risk.

**Log on and learn!** Look for *Depression and suicide* on the Magellan member website under the Library/In the Spotlight section.

**Go Online to Access  
More Information!**



## Identifying symptoms

Signs of depression vary depending on the individual, but here are some signs that might indicate suicidal tendencies.

- Intense sadness for at least two weeks
- Change in appetite or weight
- Change in sleeping patterns
- Speaking and/or moving with unusual speed or slowness
- Loss of interest or pleasure in the usual activities
- Withdrawal and isolation from family and friends
- Fatigue or loss of energy
- Feelings of worthlessness, self-reproach or guilt
- Statements such as, "There's nothing left to live for"
- Diminished ability to think or concentrate, slowed thinking, or indecisiveness
- Having obtained items that could be used in a suicide such as a gun or medications
- Increased use of drugs or alcohol.

# Coping with suicidal thoughts

If you have begun to think of suicide, it's important to recognize these thoughts for what they are: expressions of a treatable medical illness. When you're depressed, problems seem overwhelming. Although it can be very hard, try to remember that the problems are temporary, and that you can recover!

## Talk with someone

It's very important to share your feelings with someone you trust. This could be a friend, family member, therapist, member of the clergy, teacher, family doctor, or an experienced counselor at the end of a helpline. Let them know how bad things are for you now. Don't allow fear, shame or embarrassment prevent you from seeking help.

## Create a safety plan

Develop a set of steps that you can follow during a suicidal crisis. It should include emergency contact numbers for your doctor or therapist, for friends and family members who can help you, and for a suicide hotline.

## Avoid drugs, alcohol and other risks

Most deaths by suicide result from sudden, uncontrolled impulses. Since drugs and alcohol contribute to such impulses, it's vital to avoid them. Remove things from your home that you could use to hurt yourself such as pills, knives, razors, or firearms.

## Get some exercise and outdoor time

Each day, get out in the sun or into nature, and aim for 30 minutes of exercise per day. You can start small, walking around the neighborhood with a friend or doing brief 10-minute indoor workouts.

## Do things you enjoy

Even if few things bring you pleasure now, force yourself to do activities you've enjoyed previously. These can serve as a distraction from repeated negative, suicidal thoughts. Taking a break to do something you enjoy can help, even briefly.

Sources: *Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA)*, *Helpguide.org*.

## Getting help

**Contact your Magellan program.** Confidential help is available to you 24/7 by phone or online. Go to [www.MagellanHealth.com/member](http://www.MagellanHealth.com/member) to learn more about depression and suicide. Doing a confidential depression self-assessment also can help. After sign-in, look for *Depression Screening* under the *Quick Links* heading.

**Talk about your feelings with a "lifeline" counselor.** Through the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, you can reach a skilled crisis counselor. You can call for yourself or a loved one. All calls are confidential. Online crisis chat is available at [www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org).

**Share with friends and family.** Remember that you're not alone. A trusted friend or family member can help you find solutions that you may not be able to see now. Give them a chance to help you!

