

Groundwire Coaching Suicide Assessment, Intervention & Emergency Procedures

Many of our chatters express despair, hopelessness, and feelings they want to die. These are common symptoms of depression, which can lead to attempting suicide. More often than not, the chatter is not suicidal but is unable to express their feelings any other way. Threats of suicide often are a very loud cry for help and attention, but we must not decide that is the case before listening to them.

It is critical that these threats be taken seriously. Determining the validity of the threat is the key. The only way to do this is to ask questions.

Many times, chatters will use phrases such as:

“I just don’t see a point in living anymore.”

“I just can’t go on this way.”

“My life is hopeless.”

They may not come right out and use the word suicide, but we must not be afraid to ask the question point blank. Asking the question can be difficult, but there is a greater risk in dancing around the issue at hand. Asking about suicide may reduce the person’s distress, open up communications, and lower the risk of a suicide attempt.

You can ask:

“Have you been suicidal or have you been thinking about suicide?”

“Are you considering ending your life?”

“Have you ever wished that you were dead?”

“Are you thinking about killing yourself?”

There is only one way NOT to ask this important question: “You’re not thinking of suicide, are you?” The frame of this question demands a negative reply and may close off any opportunity for the suicidal person to experience the relief that someone is able to listen to his or her distress.

A person that is truly suicidal will be difficult to move on to another topic. Many times, the chatter will throw out the suicide topic but easily switch to the item that is really bothering them (relationships, parents, finances, etc.). This may be an indication that they are not really suicidal.

If you get a “Yes.” If the person says “yes” to the suicide question, you must determine immediately if they are in the process of attempting suicide, e.g., have started taking pills. Simply ask, “For your safety, I need to know if you have started to hurt yourself or if you are attempting suicide now?”

If so, your first response should be to instruct the chatter to dial 911.

If they refuse to make the call, you may need to proceed with the chat and hope the relationship improves to the point that the person becomes more cooperative in accepting help.

IP (Internet Protocol) addresses can be tricky to deal with because of the proliferation of VPNs (Virtual Private Network) and other smartphone technology which masks and shuffles IPs; therefore, there is not a lot we can do to equip emergency responders to intervene. Instead, at the end of this extremely hard conversation, please use the “Flag Conversation” drop-down and select “Criminal Activity.” This will bring it to our attention.

While online, a Team Lead is the coach’s first line of contact. Direct Message the Team Lead, and they will guide you through what to do. If necessary, they will have you transfer the chatter to them so that they can speak with this person. Team Leads can monitor a chat, give instructions to a coach via DM, and transfer the chat if necessary.

Taking an objective view of the conversation is the key. Many times, a coach may miss critical information or even discrepancies when they are actively engaged with a person. Researching the history of the chatter can also be helpful for the coach. Has this chatter been here before with the same issues?

After determining that this is a bona fide threat:

Coaches should Direct Message a Team Lead in Echo who then will make the necessary phone calls below:

*******FOR TEAM LEAD USE ONLY*******

Groundwire office (during office hours): 303-660-3582

Groundwire emergency phone number: *Dan Yeazel’s cell phone*

Contact with the police will be made **ONLY** by an appointed staff person.

*******FOR TEAM LEAD USE ONLY*******

If you get a “No.” A no response may not actually mean, “No.” The person may be afraid of the consequences of admitting their distress such as being stopped or placed in some kind of facility. Asking further questions about the topic they are willing to discuss can build trust to then gently ask again if you feel the person is possibly struggling with suicide.

There are several questions that are important in determining the risk of a particular chatter:

What’s wrong? This question will elicit the person’s version of the problem (the only one that really matters). Be aware that people need to “tell their story,” and that your willingness to listen can reduce their fear and anxiety about what they are contemplating doing. The most difficult challenge for most of us is to be quiet and listen.

Examples:

“Okay John, why don’t you tell me what’s wrong with your life right now?”

“Audrey, what made you decide to log on today?”

Most suicidal people need to talk. Others may not be listening, but now you are. Telling their story produces relief. Active listening without interjecting judgments or opinions is essential to encourage full disclosure.

Why now? Things may have been bad for a long time.

Examples:

“Robin, what has changed such that you are considering suicide now?”

“It sounds as though this relationship has been difficult for a long time. What’s different for you now?”

“Joe, it sounds like you’ve been unhappy for months and hadn’t contemplated suicide before. Why are things so unbearable now?”

An unacceptable event may not yet have happened but is foreseeable. Suicidal persons are almost always ambivalent about living or dying, and both reasons for living and dying may be expressed.

With what? The answer to this question can vary from, “I haven’t decided yet,” to “My father’s .44 magnum pistol.” In general, the more lethal means under consideration and the more available the means, the greater the suicidal intent may be.

Where and when? Specific location and/or time to carry out a suicide plan may mean a higher intent to die by suicide. The planning has been done and a place has been chosen. A specific time also indicates higher risk. Often, the answer to, “When?” may involve the action of a third party or some kind of anniversary date with special significance.

Examples:

“Have you thought about where you might try to kill yourself?”

“Have you decided when?”

“Is there something that might happen that would put your plan in motion?”

Many suicide attempts are impulsive and little or no planning will be evident. Generally, the more detailed the planning (intent) the greater the risk.

When and with what in the past? It is important to learn if the person has been suicidal in the past, or even made a suicide attempt in the past, as these behaviors are strongly indicative of suicide capability. A strong predictor of future behavior is past behavior.

Who is involved? Since many suicidal crises involve conflict with another person or persons this question will usually have been answered at some point in the conversation. They may have confided with someone else or there may be a suicide pact.

These may be the most important questions:

“Give me some reasons why you may want to live?”

“You’ve shared some reasons why you are considering suicide. What are some reasons that you should not kill yourself?”

“Can you give me three reasons to go on living?”

“Can you tell me about your core values and beliefs?”

“Who are you close to? Who matters in your life?”

“What are your dreams for the future?”

“Do you know Jesus as your personal Savior?”

Ending the chat:

Before disconnecting with the chatter, a commitment must be made that they are not in danger of hurting themselves.

The statement “I think that I will be okay” is rather vague.

“If it gets too bad, I will call someone” also is too loose. What determines when “things get too bad”? Who is the person that they will call?

Try to get a specific commitment such as:

“I promise not to hurt myself and if I start feeling bad again, I will call my Pastor, I promise.”

“I will not do it. I could not put my mom through that. I will log on again if I have to.”

A clear statement that they are not at risk presently is needed.

Emergency After-Hours Procedures

The on-call staff person should be contacted by the Team Lead if a chatter:

- Expresses that they are planning to commit suicide now, or
- Expresses that they are planning to cause harm to another now.

And the police need to be notified to prevent this event. The Groundwire on-call staff person will do this.

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Groundwire emergency phone number: *Dan Yeazel’s cell phone*

Contact with the police will be made **ONLY** by an appointed staff person.

*******FOR TEAM LEAD USE ONLY*******

To contact on-call staff, use the “Emergency: Alert Admins Now!” button in Echo (using the arrow in the top right corner of the chat). Please do this only if:

1. There is not a Team Lead online, and
2. You feel that the danger is imminent and that the authorities need to be contacted.

In the event that the On-Call Staff person needs to be contacted:

1. If a Team Lead is online, ask for their input.
2. If a Team Lead is not online, please use the “Emergency: Alert Admins Now!” button in Echo (using the arrow in the top right corner of the chat).
3. Get as much information from the chatter as possible. Try and keep the chatter on the line.
4. Ask the chatter for details. Ask if they have a plan with specifics. Be creative in getting information from them without giving them the impression that you are sending emergency personnel. This will give us time to actually notify the authorities if necessary.
5. Ask for a phone number. Ask for the last name. Ask for an address.
6. Review any chat history if available.