



FAQ: Crisis & Suicide

Why should a university care if a student is having a personal crisis?

- Studying requires full commitment – it isn't possible to separate studying from the rest of life. Everything students experience influences their studies.
- Difficulties in studying or failed exams can harm a person's confidence and their sense of self and successful studies are a core interest at a university.

Shouldn't suicidal thoughts be dealt with in the family as a private matter?

- Families and universities do not rule each other out when offering help. A higher education institution can take on its share of responsibility and provide care.

Isn't suicide a personal decision that an institution should respect?

- In the spirit of responsibility and fellowship, such a decision definitely concerns a university; an individual's autonomy is not lessened by this concern.
- Crises and suicides adversely affect a number of people, even where there is no obvious connection between them and the affected person.
- Many suicidal people give signals to people in their social network – signals that can and should be addressed.

We have a good health care system. Shouldn't we leave these unpleasant things to the experts?

- Our health care system is very important, but the social environment of students can offer valuable help in addition to medical approaches.
- Medical experts generally are not involved until a later point in time, after the problems have escalated.

Shouldn't it be a supervisor who addresses the problem?

- Crises concern us all. Looking away doesn't help anybody.
- Not all supervisors have skills in this area.



How does prevention work? The problems generally only make sense in hindsight.

- Primary prevention means having good-quality structures; for example, there should be advisory services and offices should have friendly personnel.
- Secondary prevention is done by paying attention and addressing the problems in a good way – the way active observers can.
- Addressing a crisis is important to prevent an escalation and to reduce the risk of suicide attempts.

Won't it just get worse when people talk about it? Maybe talking about suicide is what gives a person the idea to actually take their life.

- Talking about suicide is a sensitive issue, being so close to themes like failure, inability to cope, and death. But experts are convinced that we should openly address any suspicion of crisis and suicide.
- Trust your intuition that "something isn't right."

Don't people who commit suicide just want to hurt the people closest to them?

- There is a fine line between anger and care; threatening with such dramatic action is a serious burden in any kind of relationship.
- Signaling or attempting suicide is the expression of a very serious crisis.

Does a person who is always complaining and threatening really deserve to be taken seriously?

- Complainers are rarely liked.
- Crises and suicidal thoughts are often communicated unclearly; that is why it is important to remain in friendly contact and address the issue.

Don't we all have a crisis now and then? Can it really be that bad?

- A true crisis reduces a person's self-competence and goes beyond what we know and can deal with. That is why outside help is necessary.



What should you say when you are worried about someone?

- It is best to emphasize that it is your own concern, and that you continue to ask questions because you'd like to know more.
 - I have noticed you don't come to our events so much anymore – is everything okay?
 - You seem very different – or am I wrong? Is something troubling you? Would you like to tell me what it is?
 - You seem very tense and like you're under a lot of pressure. Am I right?
 - You say, you'd like to die – have you already thought seriously about suicide?
 - You can't stand it anymore. Your life doesn't make any sense. What would have to change for you to be able to keep going?

Can anyone really prevent a suicide if a person is intent on taking their life?

- There is often a great deal of ambivalence and room to influence someone who says they want to die. Talking to them is always about gaining time.
- Not now, not today, maybe never – the future is open.

If someone feels life is meaningless, isn't that their own business? You can't help them anymore.

In such a phase, it is helpful to ask concrete questions – for example: What would have to change for you to be able to keep going? – or to make concrete suggestions to improve the quality of life. It is all about small steps; you don't want to push the affected person