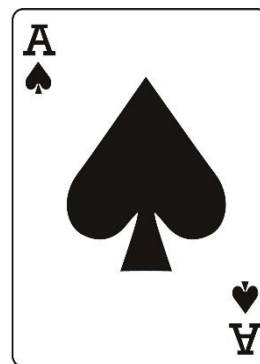


Preventing Suicide – The ACE Approach¹

By far, the most effective means of keeping someone from attempting suicide is the intervention of a friend who knows what he or she is doing. As was mentioned in this week's session, you won't become a suicide-prevention *expert* with the small amount of training you'll get through Firstline. But you don't need to be an expert. You only need to know a few things, say a few things, and take action.

In this week's study (Week 7 – "Walking Through Death Valley"), you were given a pretty extensive list of "symptoms" that are often observed in the behavior of someone who is contemplating suicide. Become familiar with that list.

If you see some of those characteristics in a friend or co-worker, play your "ACE Card." This was mentioned in the lesson, but here's a bit of an expansion on what was there.



1. Ask

- To determine if a friend is suicidal, it is helpful to:
 - Interact in a manner that communicates concern
 - Know how to manage your own discomfort in order to directly address the issue.
- The most difficult ACE step is asking.
 - "You look upset. What's going on? Are you thinking about hurting yourself?"
 - "Are you thinking about killing yourself?"
 - "Do you wish you were dead?"
- When to ask the question:
 - Ask the question anytime you think your friend may be a danger to themselves.
- Asking someone about suicide does not create suicidal thoughts any more than asking about chest pain causes heart attack.
- The act of asking may give your friend permission to talk about thoughts or feelings that no one else has been willing to listen to.
- Many people who die by suicide have communicated some intent, wish, or desire to kill themselves.
- Someone who talks about suicide gives you an opportunity to intervene before suicidal behaviors occur.

2. Care

- Show your friend that you care about what they are saying and that you are not passing judgment on what they think or feel.
 - Actively listen to their story
 - Nod your head, lean toward them, and encourage them to tell you more.
- Accept that their situation is serious and deserving of attention.
- Many suicidal ideas are associated with the presence of underlying treatable conditions.
 - Providing treatment for an underlying condition can save a life.
 - Helping the person know you care, and helping them survive the immediate crisis so they can seek such treatment is vital.

3. Escort

- Do everything you can to encourage and expedite your friend getting help.
 - Call a suicide hotline together. National Suicide Prevention hotline: 800-273-TALK (8255)
 - Call 911 together
 - Go to an emergency room
 - Go to a professional counselor or psychiatrist
 - Go to a chaplain, or clergy member
- Explain that there are trained professionals available to help.
- Suggest that treatment might help.
- If your friend tells you that they have had treatment before and it has not worked, try asking, “What if this is the time it *does* work?”
- Don’t leave your friend. If you are convinced that they are suicidal, and they won’t come with you to get help, stay with them until they do, or until something significant changes.
- Eventually, after the crisis of the moment has passed, you want to help them get to a healthcare professional who can evaluate their condition, assess possible underlying conditions, and provide treatment as appropriate.

¹ From *Suicide Prevention for Veterans and Their Families and Friends*; a Department of Veterans Affairs Resource Guide for Family Members of Veterans Who are Coping with Suicidality.