

Louanne says suicidal ideas are always serious



Ask Louanne
by Dr. Louanne Barton
Personal Counselor

Dear Louanne,

It's crunch time, and there aren't enough hours left in the semester to finish all my projects and deadlines. I'm really uptight myself, but I don't know what to do: a friend of mine is really going through huge tough personal problems right now, as well as school problems, and he mentioned to me the other day that he thought about suicide. I'm worried he may have been serious and I want to be there for him, but I don't have time with all the stuff I have to do in the next two weeks. What can I say to help?

Signed, Worried

Dear Worried,

I'm worried too! The local mental health units are full. University Park has had a record number of crisis calls this past month, and our own campus has not escaped this growing problem. Your friend may very well be serious. For many students, finishing the academic year can be the straw that breaks the camel's back. I always take suicidal ideas very seriously.

Be caring and concerned, but be direct with your friend. Ask him if he has a plan to commit suicide and if he has the means to implement the plan, such as pills or a weapon. Does he drink and drive? (Three fourths of all attempts occur under the influence of alcohol.) Academic failure and experiencing a recent loss can be precipitating factors.

It's not so much what you say to your friend that will help. Listen. Show that you care. Don't advise, moralize, or minimize by offering empty reassurances. You can try to help him develop other options and to understand that suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem. Encourage him to try to keep busy and spend time with friends. Tell others close to him such as family, roommates or the R.A. that he is having suicidal thoughts. This is one trust that should be violated.

Make sure your friend has emergency numbers close by:

Campus Police 898-6231

Hotline 453-5656

Hamot Mental Health 870-6136

Family Crisis 456-2014

Most important - encourage him to get professional help. If necessary, accompany him to my office in the Counseling Center, first floor Reed Building.

Last, but not least, take care of yourself. Remember that no matter how hard you try, you can not control another person's life. In the end we all make choices. We all must take responsibility for our own lives.

Louanne

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Lady Killer

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