

# 3 Ways to Prevent Suicide in the Black Community

Suicide is a public health epidemic. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), across all age groups, suicide rates have increased by 24% from 1999 to 2014. Although white men have the highest rate of death by suicide, followed by white women, 481 black women and 2,023 black men died by suicide in 2015 (CDC). This may not be a staggering number, but each of these lives is valuable.

With the taboo of mental illness and suicide in the black community, we may not know how to effectively address this topic. Keep reading to learn how to identify suicide warning signs and provide help that can help prevent suicide in the black community.

## Mental Health and Suicide in the Black Community

In the black community mental health is a taboo topic that is riddled with stigma. So seeking help from those close to you may feel like walking through a minefield. If you reach out to the wrong person for help you may be told that you don't have anything to be unhappy about, that you feel that way because of your own poor choices, or that you just need to do XYZ and get over it. Even if those words come from a place of love, it may be making the situation worse instead of better.

**Here are 3 things we have to stop doing to prevent suicide in the black community:**

1. **Stop stigmatizing mental illness:** According to Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health, African Americans are 20% more likely to experience serious mental health problems than the general population. Mental illness is not a weakness, it is a medical condition that can be diagnosed and treated. One in five Americans have experienced mental illness, and most people with mental illness are productive and non-violent.
2. **Stop stigmatizing therapy:** According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, only about one-quarter of African Americans seek mental health care compared to 40% of whites. We have to stop perpetuating the fear that if you seek help for mental and emotional problems that you will be labeled as crazy, weak or insane. A person's life and mental health are far more important than anyone's inaccurate opinions.
3. **Stop blaming the individual:** A person is not suicidal or mentally ill because of their choices. Mental illness is a complex illness that can be caused by biological factors, life experience, and family history. And a person does not become suicidal because they are weak, lazy, or unmotivated.

## Suicide Warning Signs

Different things can trigger suicidal feelings and actions: family history, trauma, mental health issues, chronic pain and much more. A common risk factor among people that have committed suicide is some form of mental illness.

**Here are 3 key signs that you can look for:**

1. **Verbal Signs:** A very clear sign of suicide is what someone says. Is someone you care about talking about death as a way out of life's obligations, especially small daily obligations. Maybe they feel helpless about life or they are talking about wanting to stop the burden of emotional or physical pain from a specific event. If so, listen without judgment.
2. **Emotional Signs:** When a person has lost all hope or is experiencing mental illness, they may experience changes in their mood. Little things may make them easily irritated or annoyed, or they may be in a constant state of unexplainable sadness.
3. **Behavioral Signs:** Changes in behavior is also a key sign to look for. When you experience hopelessness you may lose interest in the things that once gave you joy or develop self-destructive behavior. Maybe someone you care about is missing classes, under or overeating, not spending time with friends or becoming dependent on drugs or alcohol.

Pay attention to the person you love. Are there any changes in the in social engagement, level of worry or sadness or ability to handle daily tasks? [Click here](#) to learn more about signs and

## Preventing Suicide in the Black Community

Now that you know help is needed, what can you do about it?

1. **Be Present:** Show up for the person you care about. Oftentimes someone contemplating suicide may silently be asking for help. Just by being around you show that you care about them and value their life.
2. **Really listen:** Don't listen to judge or try to downplay their negative emotions. These are all clues that something deeper is happening, so listen. Just listen.
3. **Ask:** If you notice signs of suicide don't be afraid to ask the person if they have thought about death or considered committing suicide. This won't make someone more likely to commit suicide, but it will give the person an opportunity to be heard.
4. **Provide encouragement:** Instead of judging, provide positive encouragement. Let the person know that others have felt the same way, that help is available and that they are loved no matter what. Avoid statements that may make their feelings feel unwarranted or irrational, and do not push your personal views.
5. **Connect them to help:** Unless you are a mental health professional, you will not be qualified to handle the full burden of what your loved one is experiencing. Recognize mental illness for what it is, a medical illness and help link your loved one to care for a qualified psychologist or counselor.

## Suicide Prevention Resources

Here are a few resources that you should have on hand when talking to someone that may be suicidal:

- The National Suicide Prevention Hotline: 1-800-273-8255
- Veteran Crisis Line: 1-800-273-8255 +1
- Crisis Text Line: Text Hello to 741-741
- Crisis Chat: [Lifeline Crisis Chat](#)
- Local Psychologist or Therapist: [Psychology Today- Find a Therapist](#)

For those of you on the outside looking in, just remember to be present, be aware of warnings signs and to listen without judgment. Above all else remember to provide linkage to qualified help, and that on the other side of wanting to die is wanting to live.