

# IDENTIFYING SUICIDAL BEHAVIOR HANDOUT

## Factors that can trigger suicidal behavior

- 1) Recent excessive drinking or use of drugs. Many times, depression sets in when the person sobers up. Others commit suicide while still intoxicated.
- 2) Recent loss of a stabilizing resource. The loss of a stabilizing resource can have a devastating impact.
- 3) Severe guilt or shame over the offense. Ironically, more people take their own lives over minor offenses than serious crimes.
- 4) Inmate on inmate rape or the threat of it. For new inmates, this can simply be the fear of sexual assault.
- 5) Current mental illness. People who are depressed or delusional with voices telling them what to do may also be suicidal.
- 6) Poor health or terminal illness. This is true for all ages, and involves depression over diseases such as AIDS or cancer.

## High Risk Suicide Periods

- 1) The first 24 hours of confinement; with emphasis on the first 3 hours.
- 2) Intoxication or withdrawal. Depression frequently sets in when the inmate sobers up.
- 3) Waiting for trial.
- 4) Sentencing. The breaking point may occur just before or after sentencing.
- 5) Impending release.
- 6) Holidays. The loneliness of being confined when families are normally together can become unbearable. This is also true for personal holidays.
- 7) Dark and alone. Since suicide is a very private act, it usually occurs during the hours of darkness or when the inmate is left unsupervised.
- 8) Decreased staff surveillance. Not only nights, but also weekends and holidays can offer more opportunities for suicides.
- 9) Bad news of any kind. For example, "Dear John" letters, restraining orders prohibiting contact with family, or disturbing news of any kind.

## **Signs and Symptoms of Suicidal Behavior**

- 1) Depression or paranoia.
- 2) The inmate expresses shame or strong guilt over the offense.
- 3) The inmate talks about or threatens suicide.
- 4) The inmate is under the influence of alcohol or drugs and becomes depressed when sobering up.
- 5) Previous suicide attempts or a history of mental illness.
- 6) Severe agitation or aggressiveness.
- 7) Hopelessness or helplessness.
- 8) Unusual anxiety over consequences such as "What will my wife say?" or "What will my employer say?"
- 9) Noticeable mood or behavior change.
- 10) The inmate speaks unrealistically about getting out of jail.
- 11) Paranoid delusions or hallucinations.

## **Recognizing Signs of Depression**

- 1) Feelings of inability to go on.
- 2) Extreme sadness and crying.
- 3) Withdrawal or silence.
- 4) Loss or increase of appetite or weight.
- 5) Insomnia or waking early or excessive sleeping.
- 6) Mood or behavior changes.
- 7) Tension or anxiety.
- 8) Lethargy, which means slowness of movement or unresponsiveness.
- 9) Loss of self-esteem.
- 10) Loss of interest in people, personal appearance, or activities.
- 11) Excessive self-blaming or strong guilt feelings.
- 12) Agitation, which frequently precedes suicide.