



Delaware County Suicide Prevention Awareness Task Force

Alcohol and Suicide

What's the problem?

Alcohol is involved in 25% of all suicides in the US. Alcohol abusers have higher rates of both attempted and completed suicide than non-abusers. 20%-35% of suicide victims used alcohol just prior to death. Youth who use alcohol are more likely to be at risk of suicide than other youth. 15% of all alcohol-dependent people die by suicide (7,000 to 13,000 people every year).

How is alcohol use related to suicidal behavior?

Alcohol brings about many things that heighten suicide risk. It increases impulsivity and decreases inhibition. It increases negative self-image and decreases self-esteem. It deepens depression and social isolation. Suicide risk increases with the intake and length of time alcohol is consumed. Alcohol use is common among suicide attempters. Research shows that 65% used alcohol; 50% used alcohol just prior to the attempt. Many attempts occur during binge drinking.

Among those who are alcohol dependent, 18% complete suicide. Suicide is 120 times more prevalent among adult alcoholics than in the general population. Alcohol also plays a major role in suicides among youths, elders, and veterans. Among suicides associated with alcohol misuse men account for 80% of the victims, women for 20%.

What are the risk factors for suicide linked to alcohol use?

• Personal loss (divorce, separation, death)	• High alcohol intake, alcohol dependence
• Employment/financial loss	• Early onset of drinking
• History of abuse, trauma , violence	• Family history of alcoholism
• Past suicidal behavior	• Co-occurring mental illness
• Legal/criminal justice problems	• Access to firearms

Alcohol misusing victims typically have four or more of following factors: major depressive disorder, prior thoughts of suicide, continued drinking, poor social supports, unemployment, and living alone.

Co-occurring alcohol abuse and mental illness significantly increases risk. Those who misuse alcohol and prescription drugs have a 40 times greater risk of suicide. Such co-morbidities lessen the likelihood of help and intervention.

What are the immediate danger signs of suicide?

Immediately call a crisis center or 9-1-1 if you encounter:

- Someone threatening to hurt or kill herself or himself
- Someone looking for ways to take her or his life (i.e., a gun, pills, other lethal means)
- Someone talking, writing, or drawing about death, dying, or suicide

Other signs may include giving away personal items, trying to put personal affairs in order, making unexpected visits to relatives or friends, and references to a clear plan for completing suicide.

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