



Why do People Take Their Own Lives

There is rarely one reason why a person takes their own life. The causes of suicide are complex. Close to the time when a person becomes suicidal, they may feel trapped and hopeless and be unable to see an alternative way out of their painful situation.

For many people who die by suicide, their difficulties may be associated with underlying mental health problems (such as depression), which was undiagnosed or untreated.

There are certain characteristics associated with vulnerability and a risk of dying by suicide:

- Young and middle-aged men; people who are economically disadvantaged, and people who are homeless
- Having suicidal thoughts or a history of non-fatal self-harm
- Having a substance abuse problem, such as alcohol or drug abuse
- Having an underlying psychiatric disorder, such as major depression, bipolar mood disorder, schizophrenia, anxiety disorder, eating disorder or borderline personality disorder
- Having a family history of mental disorders, substance abuse, suicide, or violence (including physical or sexual abuse)
- Being socially isolated or a victim of bullying
- Having a traumatic experience during childhood, a history of sexual or physical abuse, or a history of parental neglect
- Having certain medical conditions, such as chronic disease, chronic pain or terminal illness

As well as these longer-standing difficulties, sometimes there may be a stressful event close to the time of death that may trigger unresolved traumatic experiences. Not everyone who dies by suicide will have some or any of these characteristics, and not all of those with these characteristics will take their own lives.

A person who is planning to take his or her own life may express direct or vague comments about suicide, dying or 'not being around'. While in retrospect, the signs may be obvious, it is important to bear in mind that suicide is difficult to predict, and loved ones do the best they could with the information they had at the time.

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