

The Role of Gatekeepers

Depending on which source you are quoting there are anything from 1,31,000 suicides (National Crime Record Bureau, 2016 data) to 2,30,000 suicides (WHO 2016 data) in India every year. India has a rate of suicide that's 65 percent above than the global average (WHO 2016 data). Suicide is a serious public health crisis.

Suicides are preventable. The key being early identification of warning signs and timely interventions. People who attempt suicide give us some warning signs or clues when they are thinking about ending their life. A friend, family member, co-worker or classmate is likely to be the first person to notice suicide warning signs in their loved ones and can act as a major buffer against suicide. These 'first responders' are known as Gatekeepers - anyone in a position to identify whether someone is contemplating suicide.

A Gatekeeper can be:

- A teacher who observes a sudden dramatic change in behaviour of a student in her class. The otherwise regular student started missing school, stays aloof, picks frequent fights with fellow classmates and remains irritable.
- A friend who notices that her loved one keeps expressing that living life is like a burden to her and feels that everyone's life would get better if she isn't around.
- A colleague who identifies that his fellow co-worker has suddenly started drinking too much and is failing deadlines, has stopped communicating with others and has unexplained anger towards everyone.

What are the warning signs Gatekeepers should watch out for?

The first step in preventing suicide is to identify the warning signs which may come in several different forms. Warning signs for suicide are defined as the earliest detectable indication of increased risk for suicide in the near future be it within minutes, hours or days. A full list is available on our website.

The mere presence of one or two signs do not indicate suicide but it is important to identify the warning signs which suggest acute distress, despair, or hopelessness about the future.

What can Gatekeepers do to save a life?

The answer is to apply QPR. It is similar in its approach with CPR (Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation). They both rely on early identification of warning signs and providing necessary intervention. QPR is designed to save a life through three key skills: Question, Persuade and Refer. When common citizens are trained in QPR, they can save many lives from suicide.

A Gatekeeper only needs to identify that some level of suicide risk is present and apply QPR. They have to ensure that the referral is made to an appropriate professional for further assessment and care.

The stigma attached to mental health-related issues can often be a hindrance for a suicidal person to seek necessary support. With a compassionate attitude towards those suffering and ability to apply QPR, we all have the capacity to save lives. Failure to recognise and respond to a suicidal person may be perceived as a lack of compassion and care for the person and interpreted by the suicidal mind as permission to proceed.

Genuine connection with other people can help the suicidal person find their purpose again. We have to make the effort to be in touch with them and assure them that their world is not over yet.