

## Suicide Awareness

According to the CDC, suicide is the second leading cause of death in individuals aged 10-34. Dancers may be at an increased risk of suicide due to the tendency of perfectionist personality, intense competitive environment of professional dance, and the psychological stress of performing at a high level. Depression often occurs for the first time during late teens to early 20s, which in dance is the time of training in high level Academies, competing for Company contracts, and often moving to new cities for jobs. Additionally, sustaining an injury makes a dancer more likely to experience depression. While not every dancer struggling with depression will become suicidal, it is important to know the warning signs and what to do if you are worried that someone may be at risk of harming themselves.

### Warning Signs of Suicide

- Expressing feelings of hopelessness or being trapped
- Talking about wanting to die or being a burden to others
- Increasing use of alcohol or drugs
- Reckless behavior
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Withdrawing from usual activities
- Spending less time with friends and isolating from others
- Changes in personality like being more anxious or angry
- Extreme mood swings

### What to do

The most important thing you can do if you are worried that a fellow dancer or friend may be thinking about suicide is to ask them directly about it. It may feel awkward at first but asking directly and expressing concern can help reduce feelings of shame, isolation, and hopelessness.

Things to say:

- “You have seemed different lately and I’m concerned, have you been thinking about hurting yourself?”
- “Since your injury you have seemed depressed and withdrawn. Have you been considering taking your life?”
- “Some of the things you have been saying lately have me worried about you. Are you thinking about killing yourself?”

Be prepared to listen to what they have to tell you without judgement. It is important that anything they say be heard and taken seriously. Do your best to resist the urge to tell them that it will get better or

that they should not feel this way, simply listen to what they have to tell you. After you ask them about potential suicidal thoughts, continue to ask questions about how long they have felt this way, what they have been going through, and if they have made a plan to hurt themselves. **Do not promise them that you will keep what they say a secret.**

If you identify that they are considering suicide and worried they may be in danger of acting immediately, call 911. If they told you that they have a plan to commit suicide you should remove any items, such as weapons or drugs, that they could use to hurt themselves.

If they expressed suicidal thoughts but do not have a plan to kill themselves, encourage the person to get help. While you can be supportive and listen, you cannot take the place of a qualified mental health professional. Therapists, counselors, doctors, local crisis centers, and support groups can all be places to turn for support and help. Reassure them that you are there to assist them in any way that you can. Calling the National Suicide Prevention Hotline (1-800-273-8255) is a great way to help find resources in your area.

Continue to support and check in after your initial conversation. Reaching out with a phone call, a text, or simple message to let them know that you care can be key in encouraging feelings of being connected and reducing isolation. While unfortunately experienced by many, suicidal thoughts should not be the norm. If you are worried that a fellow dancer may be considering hurting themselves it is your responsibility to say something even if they do not reach out. You could be the difference in saving their life.

Resources for dancers:

National Suicide Prevention Hotline

Calling this number will connect you to a trained counselor in your area who can help provide support and identify useful resources for you, including potential mental health professionals

1-800-273-TALK

#BeThe1To

This National Alliance for Suicide Prevention and the National Prevention Hotline created 5 Action Steps on communicating with someone who is suicidal and describes why each step is important

<http://www.bethe1to.com/bethe1to-steps-evidence/>

Crisis Text Line

Text with a trained counselor who can help provide support during crisis that involve intense painful emotions, such as suicide

Text 'HOME' to 741-741

References

<https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/suicide/riskprotectivefactors.html>

<https://www.dancemagazine.com/tackling-depression-2307044490.html>

<https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/help-someone-else/>

<https://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/reports/national-strategy-suicide-prevention/index.html>

<https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/THE-ACTION-PLAN.png>

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/suicide/in-depth/suicide/art-20044707>

<https://www.speakingofsuicide.com/2013/04/12/if-you-suspect/>

<http://www.bethe1to.com/bethe1to-steps-evidence/>

<https://medium.com/@c.nicholls23/how-perfectionism-in-dance-is-becoming-a-mental-health-crisis-4e795c761e3d>

***Disclaimer: The information on medical marijuana contained in this paper is intended to help inform the dancer on basic facts about medical marijuana. It is not meant to take the place of the advice of a medical professional. This information is provided by Dance/USA Task Force on Dancer Health.***

***Leanne Wonesh (2019)***