

## How does suicide happen?

A suicide may occur when both a strong **intent** to die and the **capability** for potentially lethal self-harm **come together**.

A desire to die may result from a person's **belief** that they are a burden to those close to them or that everyone would be better off without them. Shame and guilt related to gambling problems may also lead to such feelings.

A capability for lethal self-harm may arise from mentally or physically **practicing a suicide plan**, a history of **overdoses, IV drug use, violent or traumatic** experiences, and **pain or trauma**.

Substance use may often lead to “suicide talk” and vague threats of wanting to die by suicide or harm themselves. While these may not initially reflect suicidal intent, **over time this may lessen the resistance or reluctance to attempting suicide**.



**You are not alone.**

## Substance Use Resources

**Gaudenzia** - 24/7 crisis stabilization referral and treatment helpline  
**833-976-4357**  
gaudenzia.org

**SAMHSA National Treatment Locator**  
- Confidential treatment and referral information in English and Spanish for individuals with substance use concerns and their families  
**800-662-4357**  
findtreatment.gov

**Montgomery County Office of Drug and Alcohol** - Information on services for Montgomery County Residents  
**610-279-3642**

**Pennsylvania Get Help Now Helpline**  
- free, confidential support 24/7 by call, text, or chat for anyone concerned about drug or alcohol use, either for themselves or someone they care about.



## Substance Use Disorders & Suicide Risk

**Montgomery County  
Emergency Service**

50 Beech Drive  
Norristown, PA 19403

610-279-6100

www.mces.org

## What is a **substance use disorder, or SUD?**

**Substance use disorder** involves the **persistent** and **uncontrolled** use of legal or illegal drugs or alcohol despite significant personal harm and adverse effects on others, including interpersonal relationships.

Some signs of substance use are:

- Strong need for a substance
- Compulsion to use the substance regularly
- Growing tolerance over time
- Maintaining a ready supply of substances
- Inability to discontinue use
- Withdrawal symptoms

Other signs can include:

- Neglecting responsibilities
- Changes in behavior
- Physical health problems
- Poor personal care
- Problems with school or work

## How is substance use disorder **related to suicide risk?**

Almost all substance use disorders are associated with increased suicide risk. SUD confers **suicide risk 10-15 times higher than that of the general population.**

Opioid-related suicides have doubled in recent years. Heroin use increases suicide risk, and inhalant as well as cocaine use are strongly linked to suicidal behavior.

The **rate of suicide** is **2-3 times higher** in men with SUDs than those without SUDs. Among women, the use of substances increases the **risk of suicide up to 9 times** compared to women not using substances.

## Do I have a substance use problem?

If you are worried about your substance use, this quick **self-assessment can help you determine if it's time to make a change.**

Do most or all of your **social activities** include drinking, smoking marijuana or using drugs?

Have you had **regrets about your behavior** after drinking or using?

Do you **drink or use more** than you used to get the same effect?

Have you ever **forgotten all or part of an evening** after drinking?

Have you ever **missed homework, a class or done poorly on a test because of drinking or using**?

Have you ever had **personal, legal or financial problems** related to drinking or using but didn't alter your use patterns?

Do you have **any family members** with an alcohol or other drug problem?

Have you **ever tried to stop or cut down but weren't always successful**?

If you answered yes to two or more of these questions, help with substance use is available 24/7.

**Call, text, or chat.**

**988** | SUICIDE & CRISIS  
LIFELINE

## How can **substance use disorder bring on suicidal behavior?**

Not everyone with substance use disorder will become suicidal. However, someone contending with growing substance use may lose their job, their family, their home, and potentially become involved with the criminal justice system.

Their situation may seem increasingly inescapable and as their feelings of entrapment and inability to control their situation grow, thoughts of suicide as an escape may arise.

Relapse, dropping out of treatment, and being released from residential treatment may precipitate a suicide attempt.

Substance use disorders can be the trigger for a suicide attempt among those who have a psychiatric condition and suicidal thoughts.

