

## **What you need to know about substance abuse and suicide.**

- ***Suicidal people often drink alcohol or use other drugs before they make a suicide attempt. Youth who use alcohol or other illicit drugs are at especially high risk for suicidal behaviors.***

Even people who otherwise do not use or abuse alcohol may suddenly begin to drink as they approach the decision to die. Heavy and/or unusual drinking can be a warning sign for suicide, and mixing alcohol with over-the-counter or prescription medications is a deadly combination.

- ***Alcohol and depression do not mix!***

According to several expert sources, the people most at risk for dying by suicide are suffering from depression or some other disorder of mood, *and* are abusing alcohol or other drugs.

- ***Suicide risk, and the risk for violence, is highest when the person...***
  - has a firearm
  - is upset
  - and has been drinking

## **Once you have determined that a person is considering suicide with QPR, you can quickly reduce the risk of a suicide attempt by taking the following steps...**

- Do not supply alcohol or other drugs to the suicidal person; a drink or two may make things worse, not better!
- If the person has been drinking, do everything you can to sober him or her up as quickly as possible!
- Make sure any firearm or other means of suicide has been removed and safely stored away from the suicidal person.

**Note:** If you do not feel confident in intervening with someone who is intoxicated, talking about suicide and has a firearm or other means of suicide, call 911 immediately.

Finally, if the suicidal person you know is abusing alcohol or other drugs on a frequent or long term basis, please get them to a qualified treatment professional for evaluation and possible treatment. Most people who have substance problems are not getting treatment... treatment that could save their lives from suicide.

### **Sources:**

- Dr. George Murphy, *Suicide in Alcoholism*, 1992, New York: Oxford University Press
- National Household Survey on Drug Abuse, 2000, and from the National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration, U.S. Government, 2002
- National Institute of Mental Health, 2002