

# HOW TO RESPOND - HELPING THE SUICIDAL THINKER

## ANY SUICIDAL INTENT OR INFERENCE **MUST BE TAKEN SERIOUSLY**

- Every statement of suicidal intent is an expression of pain – ST needs professional help whether they actually intend to end life or not
- It does not matter if *you* think what the person is upset about is trivial, what matters is how the person feels.
- ST needs to feel heard and accepted rather than judged or ignored
- It is important to be aware of your own limitations to help – an ill prepared support person can exacerbate the situation – ASK FOR HELP/SEEK SUPPORT – Rule of Threes – at least three people supporting ST

## COMMUNICATING WITH SUICIDAL THINKER

### **DO:**

- Use Effective Language
  - Need to avoid creating an “I’ll show you!!” attitude prompting a rash, impulsive act
  - Make “I” statements vs. “You” statements – keep statements focused on self- you are less likely to say something that can be misconstrued as blame or shame
  - Avoid “Should” and “shouldn’t”
  - Talk **with** not **at** – avoid lecturing
- Create a safe environment for airing thoughts and feelings
  - Discuss in a neutral place free of distraction
  - Maintain eye contact and place yourself on same physical level
  - Speak clearly and calmly with even tone and soft expression
- Acknowledge ST’s pain
  - Honor ST’s experience/emotional state
- Express **LOVE**
  - Convey deep sense of caring and acceptance
  - Remind ST suicide is a forever decision
- Be genuine
  - ST will notice inconsistencies and may feel angry
- Be present
  - Focus all attention on ST – silence your phone, turn off TV, games, other electronic distractions
- Be quiet and listen!
  - Hear more, speak less