Substance Abuse & 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 behaviours.

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 the means available
- 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, rope, 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 111 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