Dear Alice,

I sometimes think about killing people. I don't want to have these thoughts but they go through my mind anyway. I think out ways in my mind to kill them and then kill myself. I would like to know how I can get help without confronting anyone.

Answer

Dear Reader,

You're already on your way to getting help because you've thought about how you feel, put those feelings into words, and asked for help. This in itself is no easy feat. Remember, there's a huge difference between fantasizing about hurting yourself and others, and actually carrying out those fantasies. Sometimes it may seem as if many people walk around with thoughts like yours and act on them, especially in light of the school, workplace, and community center shootings reported in the media. Remember, there are horrible, long-term consequences of actually following through on thoughts like yours?consequences that would affect you, your family, and friends, as well as those harmed by your actions and their loved ones. However, in reality, the vast majority of people who contemplate violence against their schoolmates, co-workers, family members, or even strangers don't act on their feelings. These thoughts may dart in and out of their minds, but they keep them in check.

So, why in the world would someone who has her/his head on straight even consider killing or injuring another person? There are lots of possible reasons. For some, there are overwhelming feelings of hurt. For example:

- "I can't stand her/him for making fun of me."
- "I hate them for making me feel like shit."
- "I'm going to get them back for beating me up."
- "S/he raped me or my friend."
- "S/he's going to pay for giving me a bad grade."
- "I can't stand for her/him to be with anyone else. I'm gonna make her/him regret ever breaking off our relationship."
Sometimes violent thoughts are linked with irrational hatred towards a particular group of people: "They (nerds, gay people, cheerleaders, black people, Jewish people, whomever) are such freaks. They don't deserve to live."

And killing one's self? Often thoughts of hurting oneself are these same intensely hurt feelings turned inward. Perhaps you feel some of these:

- "I'm no good. I suck at everything."
- "I have no friends. No one cares whether I live or die."
- "My parents are assholes. They don't understand me and never will. There's no use trying."
- "Maybe I'll finally get some attention if I go out with a bang."
- "I'm depressed and hopeless."

It's important to identify what causes you to have your violent feelings. Are there particular people or situations that prompt them? Do they come when you are alone or surrounded by people? Do you have day or night dreams about hurting yourself and/or others? When are the feelings the strongest? Are there times when you don't have them at all? Having extreme feelings, thoughts, or physical reactions to certain people, places, or situations might be an indication that elements of these things are pushing too many of your buttons at once. Perhaps your internal thoughts are your way of saying to yourself, "Wait a minute, what's going on here? What do I need?"

It sounds like you realize that putting your thoughts into action would not be a good idea. But whether your dreams of doing so happen every once in a while, or all the time, talking with someone about them as soon as you can might certainly make them less frightening, less frequent, and less of a threat to you and to others.

**So how and from whom can you continue to get help?** There are many options. Most cities have 24-hour anonymous crisis telephone lines, and listed below there are some nationwide services to try. If you ever find your thoughts unbearable, these hotlines can provide immediate assistance and referrals in your area. Speaking with a trusted family member, teacher you like, school counselor, residence hall advisor, dean, clergy member, or a friend's parent could help.

For less urgent assistance, online resources and books can shed light on dark thoughts and feelings. You're likely to find that there are many others who have experienced thoughts like yours, and found creative, healthy ways of expressing them and working them out. Here are some options for you:

- **National Hopeline Network** [2]
- **The Samaritans** [3] (for those in the UK)
- **Befrienders Worldwide** [4] (for everyone across the globe)

As unsettling, painful, and destructive as the recent, highly-publicized, violent events have been, they've brought greater attention and discussion to very real feelings like yours, which in turn have pushed us to find more effective ways to get assistance. No doubt, your expression of your concerns here will make it easier for others out there to say, "I need help, too."
Alice!
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