TOOL KIT Helping someone at risk of suicide

Are you thinking of suicide?

You are not alone. Thoughts of suicide occur for a range of reasons. The most important thing to remember is that you are not alone and help is available. Talking to someone is a good start, even though it may seem difficult. Approach someone you trust or call one of the helpline numbers listed at the end of this tool kit. Tell someone today if you are thinking about suicide.

Why does someone consider suicide?

People considering suicide often feel very isolated and lonely. They may feel that nobody can help them or understand them. They believe that suicide is the only way out of the difficulties that they are experiencing.

What should I do if I know someone who is thinking of suicide?

1 Do something now:

If you or someone you know is considering suicide, act immediately. Don't assume that things will get better without help or that they will seek help on their own. Reaching out now could save a life.

2 Acknowledge your reaction:

When you realise that you need to take action to help someone who is considering suicide, your natural reaction may be to:

- Panic
- Ignore the situation and hope it will go away
- Look for quick-fix solutions to make the person feel better
- Criticise or blame the person for their feelings
- Tell the person they are being silly and trivialise the issue or dismiss them

These reactions are common but not helpful. It's natural to feel panic and shock but take time to listen and think before you act. If you find you're really struggling, enlist the help of a trusted friend or helpline.

3 Be there for them:

Spend time with the person and express your care and concern. Ask them how they are feeling, hear their pain and listen to what's on their mind. Let them do most of the talking.

4 Ask if they are thinking of suicide:

Unless someone tells you, the only way to know if a person is thinking of suicide is to ask. Asking can sometimes be very hard but it shows that you have noticed things, been listening, that you care and that they're not alone. Talking about suicide will not put the idea into their head but will encourage them to talk about their feelings. They will often feel a great sense of relief that someone is prepared to talk with them about their darkest thoughts.

5 Check out their safety:

If a person is considering suicide it is important to know how much they have thought about it, so ask them about the following:

- Have they thought about how and when they plan to kill themselves?
- Are they able to carry out their plan?
- Have they ever deliberately harmed themselves?
- What support can they access to stay safe and get help?
- How can you help them draw on connections with family, friends, pets, religious convictions, personal coping strengths and strategies?

Remove any means of suicide, including weapons, medications, alcohol and other drugs, even access to a car. Be aware of your own safety.

If you are really worried, seek immediate help – phone Lifeline on 13 11 14 or phone 000 if their life is in immediate danger.

6 Decide what to do

Discuss together what steps you are going to take. Don't agree to keep it a secret.

You may need to enlist the help of others to make sure that the person gets the help and support they need.

Make keeping them safe your first priority.

Consider the long-term benefits of getting help for the person. It may mean risking the relationship you have with them, but you could be saving a life.

7 Take action:

The person can get help from a range of professional and supportive people such as: GP, counsellor, mental health service or health centre.

When the person has decided who they are most willing to tell, help them prepare what they will say and offer to accompany the person to the appointment.

Check in after the appointment and help them after the appointment, check that they raised the issue of suicide and ask what help they were offered. Help them follow through with the recommendations.

In some situations, the person may refuse to get help. While it's important that you find them the help they need, you can't force them to accept it. You need to ensure that the appropriate people are aware of the situation. Don't shoulder this responsibility alone.

8 Ask for a promise:

Thoughts of suicide often return and when they do it is important for the person to again reach out and tell someone. Encourage the person to promise to call you, a GP or Lifeline on 13 11 14 if suicidal thoughts return, and to do this before they harm themselves.

9 Look after yourself:

- Find someone to talk to - friends, family or a professional
- Recruit other people to help support the person you are worried about
- Get in touch with carer organisations or support groups. Contact Lifeline on 13 11 14 to find what's available in your area
- Try not to let your concerns about the other person dominate your life. Make sure you continue to enjoy your usual activities, take time out to have fun and keep a sense of perspective

10 Stay involved:

The continued involvement of family and friends is very important. Below are some tips to ensure the person at risk continues to get the best help possible:

- Ensure the person has 24-hour access to some form of support. This may be you, other family members and friends, or Lifeline
- Accompany the person to appointments if possible
- If you are the primary carer, try to establish a good relationship with the health professionals responsible for the person's treatment
- Advocate for the person. Sometimes a service or health professional may not be capable of meeting all the person's needs. You can advocate for appropriate services
- Discuss with the person what issues or situations might trigger further suicidal thoughts. Plan how to reduce this stress and what coping strategies can be used
- Continue to be supportive but not overprotective
- Encourage the person to write out a plan for how they are going to stay safe, the steps they will take to stay safe, and other people to get involved if things start to get tough. A clearly documented stepped plan is a useful tool to keep a person safe

  For help creating a safety plan visit: https://www.lifeline.org.au/get-help/tools/coping-kit-instructions

Mental Health

People who have recently been discharged from hospital for treatment of mental health problems may also be at higher risk of suicide. It is important that they receive ongoing support in the community.

What to look out for:

Situations - what's happening in the person's life? Have they experienced any life changes recently?

- Recent loss (a loved one, a job, an income/ livelihood, a relationship, a pet)
- Major disappointment (failed exams, missed job promotions)
- Change in circumstances (eg separation/divorce, retirement)
- Mental disorder or physical illness/injury
- Suicide of a family member, friend or a public figure
- Financial and/or legal problems

Feelings – how does the person feel about their life?

Be aware of:

- How the person feels about what's happened
- What it means to them
- Whether the pain feels bearable

Behaviours – what are they doing?

People at risk of suicide usually give clues by the way they behave. These may include:

- Previous suicide attempts
- Being moody, sad and withdrawn
- Talking of feeling hopeless, helpless or worthless
- Taking less care of themselves and their appearance
- Losing interest in things they previously enjoyed
- Difficulty concentrating and/or sleeping
- Being more irritable or agitated
- Talking or joking about suicide/death
- Expressing thoughts about death through drawings, stories, songs etc.
- Saying goodbye to others and/or giving away possessions
- Engaging in risky or self-destructive behaviour
- Increasing alcohol/drug use

Places to go for help now:

For immediate crisis intervention when life may be in danger call the ambulance or police on 000 or go to your local hospital emergency department.

For further information about places to go for help when someone is at risk of suicide, visit the Lifeline website www.lifeline.org.au

National Helpline Support

- Lifeline 13 11 14
- Kids Helpline 1800 55 1800
- Mensline Australia 1300 78 99 78
- The Suicide Call Back Service 1300 659 467

For 24-hour telephone crisis support call 13 11 14. For more information visit www.lifeline.org.au

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