

# Suicide prevention

## Knowing the signs

It is not always possible to know if someone is thinking about suicide; people don't often talk directly about it, sometimes their communication is indirect and even unclear. If you or someone you know is thinking about suicide keeping safe is the first priority. From there it is about finding the support you need to refocus your thoughts, develop other options and rebuild hope.

## WHY DOES SUICIDE HAPPEN?

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Suicide is a complex issue and is a relatively rare event in young people, however when it does happen it has tragic consequences and sets off deep ripple effects for individuals, families and the whole community.

There are a broad range of reasons that might contribute to a young person considering suicide. It's related to their mood, what has happened in the past, what is happening currently in their lives,

## Urgent Assistance

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how they are coping and how supported and connected they feel.

Young people who think about taking their life often believe that nobody cares about them, that they don't belong and that things are hopeless. They are often exhausted by their distress and unable to think clearly through any other options. They might be so unhappy that they are unable to sleep, eat, or enjoy any part of their life.

People with conditions such as depression, bipolar disorder, eating disorders and substance abuse are more likely to think about suicide.

Feelings of hopelessness and thoughts of suicide can be much worse following very stressful experiences. These might include a relationship breakup or traumatic life event, feeling totally alone and without any friends or family, grief after the death of someone close, losing a job or failing a big exam.

## WARNING SIGNS

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Sometimes there are things that people say or do that can help you begin to understand how they are feeling. It might be the words they use (“No one cares about me anymore.”), a change in how they act around you, or perhaps a dramatic change in their mood. Young people might display one or more of these behaviours at times of stress. If you see these signs then it is important to ask about what is going on, how they feel and whether they are thinking about suicide.

Other warning signs for suicide include:

### HOW THEY MIGHT FEEL

- Sad, angry, ashamed, rejected, desperate, lonely, irritable, overly happy or exhausted.
- Trapped and helpless: “I can’t see any way out of this.”
- Worthless or hopeless: “I’m on my own— no one cares. No one would even notice I was gone.”
- Guilty: “It’s my fault, I’m to blame.”

### WHAT THEY MIGHT BE DOING

- Spending less time with family and friends.

- Isolating themselves, pushing people away.
- Talking or writing about death, dying or suicide and giving away possessions.
- Stopping doing things that they previously enjoyed.
- Increasing alcohol and/or drug use.
- Doing dangerous, life-threatening actions without concern for their safety.
- Changing their approach to their physical health; changes in sleep, diet, level of exercise.

### WHAT ELSE THEY MIGHT SAY

- “They’d be better off without me.”
- “I just don’t fit in anywhere.”
- “What is the point? Things are never going to get any better.”
- “I just can’t take this anymore.”
- “Nothing I do makes a bit of difference, no one can help me.”
- “If I died no one would miss me.”

## IF YOU ARE SUICIDAL

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Many young people think about suicide but for most young people that is as far as it gets; they do not go on to act on their thoughts and take their own life.

Having suicidal thoughts can be scary. You may have never had them before, or perhaps the thoughts have been there for a while and you are not sure what to do. You may be ashamed to talk about it or worry that people will not take you seriously and just tell you to “Get over it”. In the short term you need to find ways to stay safe. Once you are safe you can work out how you are going to get the help you need.

## LET SOMEONE KNOW

- Share how you feel with someone you trust and feel comfortable with, a family member, teacher, doctor or other health professional
- Try and think about it as any other conversation. You can describe what has happened, how you feel and what help you need. It's best to be direct so that they understand how you feel.
- Be prepared for their reaction. Often people who learn that someone is suicidal can be quite confused and emotional at first. Just keep talking and together you can find a way through it.
- Ask your friends/family member to help you find support; in person, online, over the phone.
- Understand that others do care. It is important to have support from your friends but if you tell them about your suicidal thoughts you cannot expect them to keep it a secret. They want to be able to help you stay safe and that usually means calling in extra help.

## STAY SAFE

- Remember that thoughts of suicide are just thoughts; you do not have to act on them. These thoughts might only last a few minutes; you might feel differently in a few hours.
- Postpone any decisions to end your life. Give yourself time to get the support you need.
- Remove anything in the house that you might use to impulsively harm yourself – maybe give it to a friend.
- Keep crisis line phone numbers or web links in your mobile phone for easy use.
- Avoid being alone. Have someone near you until your thoughts of suicide decrease.

- Avoid drugs and alcohol. They can intensify how you feel and make decision making harder.

### Make a safety plan

- Make a list of things that you can do when you notice your suicidal thoughts returning. Include things that calm you down, things you enjoy, e.g. talking with friends and things that help you to refocus your thoughts. For other ideas see [suicidecallbackservice.org.au/are-you-thinking-about-suicide-or-self-harm/making-a-safety-plan](http://suicidecallbackservice.org.au/are-you-thinking-about-suicide-or-self-harm/making-a-safety-plan)
- Think about who you can contact (*beyondblue*, Kids Helpline, headspace, ReachOut, Lifeline, Suicide Callback Service).

## DECREASE STRESS

- Cut back on commitments, postpone major decisions until you are more able to make them, ask to take on different responsibilities at home or at work, or take time out to do activities you enjoy.

## FIND WHAT WORKS FOR YOU

- Set yourself some tasks to do on a day to day basis, or even hour by hour if you need to. Reward yourself as you achieve small goals.
- Learn about different coping strategies, including mindfulness. [smilingmind.com.au](http://smilingmind.com.au) helps you to practice mindfulness; a useful tool to manage suicidal thoughts.
- Do some physical exercise every day, preferably outdoors, no matter how hard it is to get going. Not only will this help to give a natural boost, it should help you to sleep better at night.

- Consider asking a friend to 'buddy' with you for regular exercise sessions.
- Notice the times that you feel a bit better. These times might be short at first, 5-10 minutes, but as you learn to cope in different ways these times should become more frequent and last longer.
- Do things regularly that you enjoy. Catch up with friends, neighbours and family members, or perhaps join a group doing something that interests you.
- Try to challenge how you think about things. By thinking in more realistic, positive and reassuring ways you can influence how you feel. It's about changing your unhelpful thoughts to thoughts that can help you to move forward and feel more in control.

#### Helpful thinking:

- Is this situation as bad as I am making it out to be?
- "I don't think that went very well, but I guess I could try again."
- "I wish that hadn't happened, but it has, so I just have to accept it".
- Is there something I can learn from this situation, to help me do it better next time?

#### Unhelpful thinking:

- "What is the point? Things are never going to get any better."
- "Nothing I do makes a bit of difference, no one can help me."
- "That was a disaster. Nothing ever works out for me."
- "It's never going to work."
- Get support from a health professional in person, online or over the phone. A health professional can help you work out how you are feeling and offer ideas about ways to approach the problem. They can offer a different perspective and help you to achieve your goals. For

more information on what service to contact, see [Where to find support](#).

## FOR A FRIEND

It can be hard to understand why someone wants to take their own life but whatever your reaction, it is important to talk with them about it. It can be a challenging, unfamiliar and uncomfortable conversation to start but it might be life-saving. This website offers some practical suggestions on having a conversation about suicide: [conversationsmatter.com.au](http://conversationsmatter.com.au)

Most people who feel suicidal recover from these intense feelings but it's often difficult to know what to say or how to make sure the person is safe. As a friend you can support them and let them know that there is help available; they are not alone. Support from other friends, family and health professionals is also essential at these times.

### LOOK

- If you notice any of the warning signs and are worried about a friend talk about it with them.

### LISTEN

- Make time to listen. Sometimes listening is what the person really needs as it helps to 'let it out'.
- Let them know you are there if they need to talk.

### TALK

- Ask them directly about suicide. "You've been really down lately and you haven't been going out for weeks, I'm wondering how you are feeling? I'm wondering if they might be so bad that you are thinking about killing yourself and if you have made any plans?"

- Talking about suicide gives young people a chance to share how they feel and explore what they might need to feel better.
- If you think you said the wrong thing, try again. Let them know you care, that you found it hard to hear, but that you want to help them. You don't need to have all the answers but you can help them to stay safe while they get other support.

## SEEK HELP

- Encourage them to talk with someone who can help – their parents, teachers, doctor or a local counsellor. Another great option is *beyondblue*, Kids Helpline or Lifeline.
- Family, friends and health professionals can make a big difference in helping people stay safe and find positive reasons for living. See the information on the back for health service contact details.

## SPEAK UP

- If your friend is joking or talking about suicide, giving possessions away, or saying goodbye then you need to take it seriously. You might tell their parents, partner or trusted adult, or contact emergency services for help.
- Even if you promised not to tell, what's most important is that your friend needs your help to stay safe. You can talk with them another time about why others had to get involved. Suicide is not an easy situation to cope with. It's not your sole responsibility to take care of your friend. It's OK to ask for the support of others.

## TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

- Supporting someone who is suicidal can be confronting and emotionally exhausting.
- Try to find the balance between supporting them and looking after yourself.
- Be clear about your boundaries – telling them they can call you 'any time' might mean that you miss out on much needed sleep. Know what your limits and boundaries are. If you run yourself into the ground you won't have anything to offer your friend.
- Look after your physical health: eat well, exercise daily and get regular sleep.
- Look after your emotional health too; talk with someone about what is happening. You can respect your friend's privacy but still talk to someone about how it is affecting you and what you should do to help your friend.
- Online and phone support services can also help you in these situations.

Many young people think about suicide when things seem impossible or like there is no way out. Most young people find a way to shift their thoughts from this sense of hopelessness and despair to thoughts about their future. They make small changes each day to how they think, who they spend time with and what they do. It is about refocusing their thoughts on what they can change, and moving on from the things that they cannot.

**If you have thoughts about suicide talk to someone about it – support is available. If you know someone who is thinking about suicide, talk about it with them. Keeping safe is the first priority and from there you can support them to find the help they need.**

# Where to find support



## For help with how you're feeling

### *beyondblue*

[www.youthbeyondblue.com](http://www.youthbeyondblue.com)

Learn more about anxiety and depression and how to talk about it with your friends, or talk it through with our Support Service.

 1300 22 4636

 Email or  chat to us online at [www.beyondblue.org.au/getsupport](http://www.beyondblue.org.au/getsupport)

### Kids Help Line

[www.kidshelp.com.au](http://www.kidshelp.com.au)

1800 55 1800

### headspace

[www.headspace.org.au](http://www.headspace.org.au)

[www.eheadspace.org.au](http://www.eheadspace.org.au)

1800 650 890

### ReachOut

[Reachout.com](http://Reachout.com)

## Urgent Assistance

If you or someone you care about is in crisis and you think immediate action is needed, call emergency services (triple zero – 000), contact your doctor or local mental health crisis service, or go to your local hospital emergency department. Do not leave the person alone, unless you are concerned for your own safety.

### Lifeline

[www.lifeline.org.au](http://www.lifeline.org.au)

13 11 14

### Suicide Call Back Service

[www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au](http://www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au)

1300 659 467



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