

# SUICIDE PREVENTION

## Suicide warning signs

A person who is thinking about suicide will usually give some clues or signs to those around them that indicate that they are distressed. Suicide prevention starts with recognising these warning signs and taking them seriously.

The following is a list of signs that people might give when they are feeling anguished and overwhelmed, in order to communicate their distress to others. These physical changes and behaviours are indicators that a person might be thinking about suicide. Some of these signs are strong indicators that a person may be thinking about suicide. It is most likely that a suicidal person will display a combination of these signs rather than one single sign.

## Observable signs (physical changes and behaviours) of suicide risk

### Physical changes

- Loss of physical energy
- Loss of interest in personal hygiene or appearance
- Major changes to sleeping patterns, too much or too little
- Loss of interest in sex
- Sudden and extreme changes in eating habits, either loss of appetite or increase in appetite
- Weight gain or loss
- Increase in minor illnesses

### Behaviours

- Unexplained crying
- Emotional outbursts
- Alcohol or drug misuse
- Uncharacteristic risk-taking or recklessness (for example, driving recklessly)
- Fighting and/or breaking the law
- Withdrawal from family and friends
- Quitting activities that were previously important
- Prior suicidal behaviour
- Self-harming
- Putting affairs in order e.g. giving away possessions, especially those that have special significance for the person
- Writing a suicide note or goodbye letters to people

## Conversational signs

- Escape: "I can't take this anymore."
- No future: "What's the point? Things are never going to get any better."
- Guilt: "It's all my fault, I'm to blame"
- Alone: "I'm on my own, no-one cares about me."
- Damaged: "I've been irreparably damagedâ€¦ I'll never be the same again."
- Helpless: "Nothing I do makes a bit of difference", "It's beyond my control."
- Talking about suicide or death
- Planning for suicide

## Feelings

- Desperation
- Sadness
- Anger
- Shame
- Worthlessness
- Powerlessness
- Loneliness
- Isolation
- Disconnection
- Hopelessness

## Responding to warning signs of suicide

### Speak up if you are worried

Talking to a friend or family member about their suicidal thoughts and feelings can be extremely difficult. But if you're unsure whether someone is suicidal, the best way to find out is to ask.

Sometimes people are worried that they might 'put the idea of suicide into the person's head' if they ask about suicide. You can't make a person suicidal by showing that you care. In fact, giving a suicidal person the opportunity to express his or her feelings can provide relief from loneliness and pent-up negative feelings, and may prevent a suicide attempt.

Ways to start a conversation about suicide:

- I have been concerned about you lately.
- I wanted to check in with you because you haven't seemed yourself lately.

Questions you can ask the person:

- How can I best support you right now?
- How long have you been feeling this way?

What you can say that helps:

- You are not alone in this. I'm here for you.

- I may not be able to understand exactly how you feel, but I care about you and want to help.

## Assess the risk of suicide

If a participant tells you that he or she is thinking about suicide, it is important to evaluate the risk. Those at highest risk in the immediate future have the intention to end their life, a specific plan, the means to carry out the plan and a timeframe.

The following questions can help you assess the person's risk.

1. Do you intend to take your life? (INTENTION)
2. Do you have a plan to take your life? (PLAN)
3. Do you have access to the means to carry the plan out? (pills, gun, etc) (MEANS)
4. Do you have a timeframe for taking your life? (TIMEFRAME)

If the person is at high risk of suicide, seek immediate help by calling 000 (police, ambulance), or with their permission take the person to hospital.

## Supporting someone to get help

Looking after someone who is suicidal can be a difficult and overwhelming experience, but you do not need to do it alone. After you've talked to them about how they're feeling, the next step is to support them to get help to deal with these feelings and keep them safe.

## In an EMERGENCY

If the person is in immediate danger, or you are concerned for their safety:

- Call 000 and request an ambulance. Stay on the line, speak clearly, and be ready to answer the operator's questions.
- Take the person to your local hospital's emergency department.
- Call your local Public Emergency Mental Health Service.

Each of these emergency services teams are specially trained to support people in crisis, including people feeling suicidal, and are able to keep the person safe.

There are a number of services and professionals available to help a person through this overwhelming time. Depending on what is going on for the person and their personal preferences, they may wish to speak to someone over the phone, or prefer to seek help face to face. Whichever they choose, it's important that they are as honest as possible about their situation and the way they're feeling, so they can get the right help.

## If they are reluctant to seek help

- Be clear that you are unable to provide sufficient support on your own and you need to bring in extra support from a professional.
- Remind them that their safety is the ultimate priority, and professional support will help keep them safe.
- Normalise the idea of seeking help as much as possible.

- If they're reluctant to see someone face to face, online counselling can be a non-threatening way to get support. The Suicide Call Back Service offers [online counselling](#) to people at risk of suicide.
- If you are comfortable, offer to accompany them to their first appointment to support them.
- It may also help to let the person know that accessing professional support will help both of you.

## Contact details you need to know

The following is a list of support options available to help someone who is suicidal:

Emergency services - 000

Suicide Call Back Service - 1300 659 467

Lifeline - 13 11 14

Kids Helpline - 1800 55 1800

Beyond Blue - 1300 22 4636

MensLine Australia - 1300 78 99 78

Operation Life Online for Veterans - 1300 659 467

Headspace - 1800 650 890