

Tool kit for helping someone at risk of suicide

Are you concerned that someone close to you is considering suicide?

Have you noticed changes in their attitude and behaviour?

Has someone you know attempted suicide?

Would you like to know how to help them keep safe?

It is distressing to realise that someone close to you may be considering suicide. This tool kit will help you identify signs to look for, decide what to do and learn what help is available.

Most people who consider suicide get through the crisis. Family, friends and professionals can make a big difference in helping people stay safe and re-establish reasons for living.

Are you yourself thinking of suicide?

You are not alone. Thoughts of suicide occur to many people and for a range of reasons. The most important thing to remember is that help is available. Talking to someone is a good place to start, even though it may seem difficult. Approach a trusted friend or call one of the 24-hour numbers listed on page five. Tell someone today!

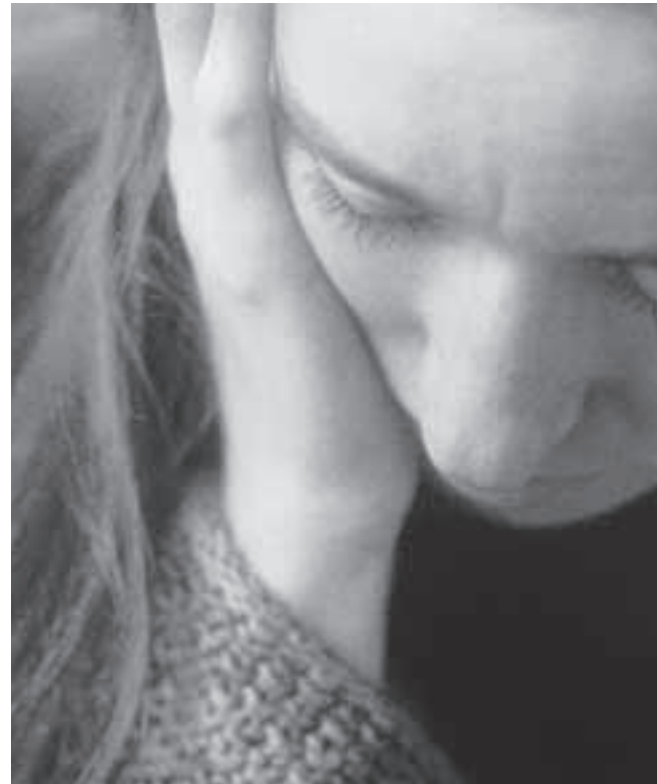
Why does someone consider suicide?

Typically, many factors are involved. It is known that mental health problems, particularly depression, can increase vulnerability to suicide. Here are some clues about what to look 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 pet)
- Major disappointment (failed exams, missed job promotions)
- Change in circumstances (retirement, redundancy, children leaving home)
- Mental disorder or physical illness
- Suicide of a family member, friend or a public figure
- Financial and/or legal problems



Feelings – how does the person feel about it?

Events like the above can be difficult and sometimes devastating. Most people who experience them do not consider suicide, but some do. Be aware of:

- How the person feels about what 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 their behaviour. 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- Being moody, sad and withdrawn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 previously enjoyed
- Finding it hard to concentrate
- Being more irritable or agitated
- Talking or joking about suicide
- 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

Mental Health

Mental health problems can increase the risk of suicide. We may not know a person's mental health history, however we may notice that a person seems depressed or anxious, and/or is misusing alcohol or other drugs. They may have told us that they are receiving treatment for a mental health problem.

Having a mental health problem does not mean a person will have thoughts of suicide – many don't. However, mental health problems can affect the way people view problems. They affect motivation and openness to seek help, therefore we need to be particularly aware of the possible risk of suicide.



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. You may be able to help by supporting them to attend any follow-up visits with their GP or mental health specialists.

What do I do now?

People considering suicide often feel very isolated and alone. They may feel that nobody can help them or understand their psychological pain. When unable to see any other way of dealing with pain, suicide may seem to be a way out. Sometimes people who have been distressed and openly suicidal become outwardly calm. Be aware that this may mean many things, including their quiet resolution to complete their suicide plan.

The important thing to remember is that if someone is not their usual self or if they are showing signs that arouse your concern you need to check it out. This tool kit will help you to talk to someone about suicide and then decide what steps to take.

Most people who consider suicide get through the crisis. The help and support of family, friends and professionals can make a big difference. The following tips will help you know what to do.

Tool Kit

1 Do something now

If you are concerned that someone you know is considering suicide, act promptly. Don't assume that they will get better without help or that they will seek help on their own. It's easy to avoid being part of that help, or to hope that someone else will step in. 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

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. Following the tips below will help you get through. If you find you're really struggling, enlist the help of a trusted friend.

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. Problems can seem more manageable after speaking about them.

This tool kit will help you identify signs to look for, decide what to do and learn what help is available. Most people who consider suicide get through the crisis. Family, friends and professionals can make a big difference in helping people stay safe and re-establish reasons for living.

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 are not on their own. Talking about suicide will not put the idea into their head but will encourage them to talk about their feelings. It opens up options for checking out risk, attending to safety and getting further help.

5 Check out their safety

If a person is considering suicide it is important to know how much thought they have put into it. Ask about the following:

- Have they thought about how and when they plan to kill themselves?
- Do they have the means 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 links to family, friends, pets, religious convictions, personal coping strengths?

Use this information to decide what to do. If you are really worried, don't leave the person alone. Seek immediate help – see contact numbers below or phone Lifeline on 13 11 14. Remove any means of suicide available, including weapons, medications, alcohol and other drugs, even access to a car.



6 Decide what to do

Now that you have this information you need to discuss together what steps you are going to take. What you decide to do needs to take into account the safety concerns that you have. Do not agree to keep it a secret.

You may need to enlist the help of others to persuade the person to get professional help – or at least take the first steps to stay safe. These may include their partners, parents, or close friends. Only by sharing this information can you make sure that the person gets the help and support they need.

Sometimes the person at risk says they do not want help. Yet we know most people are in two minds about suicide. Make keeping them safe your first priority. Consider the long-term benefits of getting help for the person. It may mean risking the relationship but you could be saving a life.

7 Take action

The person can get help from a range of professional and supportive people:

- GP
- Counsellor, psychologist, social worker
- School counsellor, youth group leader, sports coach
- Emergency services – police and ambulance
- Mental health services
- Community health centres
- Priest, minister, religious leader
- Telephone counselling services such as Lifeline and Kids Help Line

When the person has decided who they are most willing to tell, help them prepare what they will say. Many people find it difficult to express their suicidal thoughts.

Offer to accompany the person to the appointment. 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. Do not 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. Asking them to promise to do this makes it more likely that it will happen. Encourage the person to promise to call you or Lifeline 13 11 14 if the suicidal thoughts return, and to do this before they harm themselves.

9 Look after yourself

If you're helping someone who is considering suicide, make sure you also take care of yourself. It is difficult and emotionally draining to support someone who is suicidal, especially over an extended period.

- Don't do it on your own. Find someone to talk to, maybe 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's Just ask 1300 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.
- Contact Lifeline on 13 11 14 (24 hours a day) for support.

10 Stay involved

Thoughts of suicide do not easily disappear without the person at risk experiencing some change. Their situation, or their feelings about it, may change, or they may feel more supported and able to deal with it. In either situation, the continuing 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 13 11 14.
- Accompany the person to appointments if possible. Your support can be a great encouragement.
- If you are the primary carer, try to establish a good relationship with the health professionals responsible for the person's treatment. Your opinion and input is valid and may be very valuable.
- 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.



Suicidal thoughts do not easily go away on their own.

People need to see change in their life and they need help to achieve that change.

You are part of that help.

- 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.

Where to get help

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

24-hour crisis telephone counselling services:

National

Lifeline..... 13 11 14
Kids Help Line 1800 55 1800

ACT

Crisis Assessment and Treatment Team 1800 629 354

New South Wales

Suicide Prevention and Crisis Intervention 1300 363 622
Salvo Care Line 02 9331 6000

Northern Territory

Crisis Line Northern Territory 1800 019 116

Queensland

Crisis Counselling Service 1300 363 622

South Australia

Mental Health Assessment and Crisis Intervention Service 13 14 65

Tasmania

Samaritans Lifelink - country 1300 364 566
Samaritans Lifelink - metro 03 6331 3355

Victoria

Suicide Help Line Victoria 1300 651 251

Western Australia

Samaritans Suicide Emergency Service - country 1800 198 313
Emergency Service - metro 08 9381 5555

Web sites:

<http://auseinet.flinders.edu.au>

Australian Network for Promotion, Prevention and Early Intervention for Mental Health, useful resources, links and fact sheets

www.justlook.org.au

A large online national database of low cost or free health and community services throughout Australia

www.beyondblue.org.au

An Australian site with information on depression

www.community-life.org.au

A site that builds community capacity for suicide prevention

www.depressionet.com.au

An on-line Australian resource on depression

www.kidshelp.com.au

A site offering telephone and email counselling for young people

www.livingworks.org.au

A site that provides training for all kinds of caregivers, increasing their ability to reach out to a person at risk

www.reachout.com.au

Information about suicide prevention for young people, families, communities and professionals

www.suicideinfo.ca

Suicide Information and Education Centre (SIEC)

Services:

Your GP (see Yellow Pages for listing)

Mental Health Team

(see Community Health Centres in the White Pages)

Counselling/Psychological Services

(see Yellow Pages for listing)

Sane Australia help line..... 1800 688 382

For help finding services, call Lifeline's **Just ask** on 1300 13 11 14. Remember, Lifeline's **Just ask** is an information service, not a crisis or counselling service. The service operates Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm (EST) or visit the web site at www.justask.org.au

Resources:

Beyond Suicide Attempts booklet – information for parents, foster parents and guardians following the suicide attempt of a young person. Available from Lifeline's Just ask

Training:

ASIST - many Lifeline Centres throughout Australia provide Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST) if people are looking for further training in this area. Contact LivingWorks to find an ASIST training near you, 03 9894 1833 or info@livingworks.org.au

Lifeline's
Just ask
1300 13 11 14
Your rural mental health
information service

This tool kit has been produced by Lifeline's **Just ask** as a public service. You are welcome to reproduce it without alteration.

We invite your feedback and comments. Call 1300 13 11 14



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