

## A self help guide:

# Are you worried about someone who is distressed or thinking about suicide?



## Suicide – what you can do to help

It is distressing to realise that someone close to you may be considering taking their own life. If you believe someone is thinking about ending their life it's natural to feel panic or even want to avoid thinking about it. This information will help you decide what you can do to help.

## Why does someone consider suicide?

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, it may seem to be the only way out to them at that time. The important thing to remember is that if someone is showing signs that arouse your concern you need to check it out.

Typically, many factors are involved. Some life events can increase a person's risk of suicide, such as recent loss (a loved one, a job, an income or livelihood), a major disappointment (relationship breakdown, separation from children, failed exams, missed job promotions) or a mental illness.

## Suicide warning signs – what to look out for

Some of the warning signs to look out for include:

- **sudden changes in mood or behaviour**
- **being sad and withdrawn**
- **talking of feeling hopeless, helpless or worthless**
- **taking less care of themselves**
- **expressing thoughts about death through, for example, drawings, stories, songs**
- **expressing suicidal thoughts**
- **a suicide attempt or act of self-harm**
- **increased use of alcohol or drugs**
- **talking about suicide or making a plan**, but also take seriously statements such as 'I wish I could just go to sleep and not wake up', 'I can't go on', 'I'd be better off dead', 'Everyone's better off without me'.
- **looking for ways to kill themselves**, unusual focus on death, dying, or violence; perhaps writing poems, or stories, about death.
- **displaying signs of depression such as feeling helpless or trapped**; feeling that there is no hope – 'There's no way out'; not sleeping or eating well or becoming very anxious;

having feelings of worthlessness, guilt, shame, and self-hatred; feeling like a burden – ‘Everyone would be better off without me’.

- **getting affairs in order**, this may include making a will, giving away prized possessions or making arrangements for family members.
- **saying goodbye** to people as if they won't be seen again; unusual or unexpected visits or calls to family and friends.
- **withdrawing from others and increasing social isolation**
- **feeling rage or uncontrolled anger**
- **taking unnecessary risks as if they have a ‘death wish’**
- **sudden sense of calm**: sometimes people who have been distressed and suicidal become outwardly calm. Be aware that this may mean many things, including their quiet resolution to complete their suicide plan.
- **self harm**: all acts of self-harm should be taken seriously. Whilst self harm is a communication of intense distress, people who self harm are at a high risk of suicide.

## **Suicide risk factors: what to look out for**

These may increase the risk of suicide:

- access to a method of suicide, such as medication, firearms
- loss of someone close (such as a friend or family member)
- relationship break-up
- recent contact with criminal justice services (for example police), victim of crime or release from prison.

Some of these warning signs can be associated with everyday behaviour and should be looked at as part of the overall picture of the person you are concerned about. However, the more warning signs and risk factors there are, the higher the possible risk is.

### **Please note:**

**If someone says they want to kill themselves this must always be taken seriously. In the past it was said that people who talked about suicide or had already attempted suicide didn't really want to die – this isn't true.**

## **What can you do to help?**

People who consider taking their own lives can be helped to get through the crisis. The help and support of family, friends and professionals can make a big difference. If someone confides in you, listen carefully to everything they say and try not to judge or offer too much unwelcome advice. Sometimes just being there and showing that you care enough to listen can help.

You could let them know that others feel like this too and that they are not alone in trying to cope with suicidal thoughts. There are people who can help them. If they will not talk to you, perhaps they would talk to another friend or a relative, or write down how they feel.

**Always try to encourage them to visit their GP if you think they might be suicidal or depressed.**

## Ten things you can do to help

There are several things you can do to help someone who may be suicidal. You may find the ten suggestions below helpful.

### 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. Reaching out now could save a life.

### 2. Acknowledge your reaction

Your natural reaction may be to panic, ignore the situation and hope it will go away, or look for quick-fix solutions to make the person feel better. These reactions are common. 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, and listen to what's on their mind. Let them do most of the talking. Problems can seem more manageable after speaking about them. Offer support and let them know you care. Say something like: 'I'm worried about you and I want to help'.

### 4. Ask if they are thinking of suicide

The only way to know if a person is thinking about suicide is to ask. It can often be a relief for people to be asked about what they are feeling. 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. If they have been thinking of suicide, they will probably be relieved to talk about it and grateful that you are willing to be so open and understanding. Don't agree to keep their suicidal thoughts or plans a secret. It is not easy to ask about suicide ideas; it is helpful to lead into the topic gradually with due attention to the person. For example:

- Do you feel unhappy and hopeless?
- Do you feel desperate?
- Do you feel unable to face each day?
- Do you feel life is a burden?
- Do you feel life is not worth living?
- Do you feel like harming yourself?
- Do you feel like ending your life?
- Do you ever feel so bad that you think of suicide?

### 5. Check out their safety

If a person is considering taking their own life it is important to know how much thought they have put into it. You could 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?
- 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?

If you are really worried, don't leave the person alone. Remove any means of suicide available, including weapons, medications, alcohol and other drugs, even access to a car.

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

- general practitioner (family doctor)
- for urgent access to services - ring 111 - 24 hours a day, 365 days a year
- services such as the Samaritans - 116123 (24 hour helpline)
- counsellor, psychologist, social worker
- school counsellor, youth group leader
- priest, minister, religious leader.

See **useful contacts** for information about how to contact these services.

## 6. Decide what to do

Now that you have this information you need to discuss together what steps you are going to take. 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.

## 7. Take action

When the person has decided who they are most willing to tell, help them prepare what they will say. Offer to accompany the person to the appointment. Help them follow through with the recommendations made at the appointment.

In some situations the person may refuse to get help. While it's important that you help them find help, 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 they will actually seek help.

## 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.

## 10. Stay involved

Thoughts of suicide do not easily disappear without the person at risk experiencing some change in their life or personal circumstances. 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.

Suicidal thoughts do not easily go away on their own. People need help to overcome these thoughts. Your help can make all the difference.

## Starting a difficult conversation

There are some suggestions available from the Samaritans which will help you to start a difficult conversation with someone you are concerned about. These cover advice on how to ask the right questions to find out how they are feeling and checking they know where to get help.

See [www.samaritans.org.uk](http://www.samaritans.org.uk) under the section 'Your Emotional Help'.

## Main contacts

Get the person you are worried about to make an urgent appointment with their general practitioner (GP). If they do not have a GP, then please contact the local health authority and one or more of the resources below to get immediate help whilst they are being allocated a doctor.

**Ring NHS 111** for urgent access to services - 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

### Accident and emergency (hospital)

Go to your nearest accident and emergency unit and tell the staff how you are feeling.

Visit [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk) (key the word 'suicide' into the search box in the right hand corner of the screen). There is a list of resources you can contact.

### Samaritans

Confidential, non-judgemental, emotional support, for people experiencing feelings of distress or despair, including those which may lead to suicide. They offer their service by telephone, email and letter, and face to face in most of their branches.

helpline: 08457 90 90 90 (24 hours)

email: [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)

write to: Chris, PO Box 9090, Stirling, FK8 2SA

[www.samaritans.org.uk](http://www.samaritans.org.uk)

**In an emergency, phone 999**

## Useful contacts

### **British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy**

For details of local practitioners

tel: 01455 883316

[www.bacp.co.uk](http://www.bacp.co.uk)

### **Campaign Against Living Miserably [CALM]**

A campaign and charity set up to reduce the high suicide rate among young men (under 35).

They have a helpline, magazine and online community, but CALM listens to anyone who needs help or support.

helpline: 0800 585858 (free from landlines 5pm – midnight every Saturday, Sunday, Monday and Tuesday).

[www.thecalmzone.net](http://www.thecalmzone.net)

[info@theCALMzone.net](mailto:info@theCALMzone.net)

### **Carers Direct and helpline (NHS service)**

If you need help with your caring role and want to talk to someone about what options are available to you. 'Call back' and online enquiry services.

helpline: 0808 802 0202 (freephone 8am to 9pm Monday to Friday, 11am to 4pm at weekends)

[www.nhs.uk/CarersDirect](http://www.nhs.uk/CarersDirect)

### **Carers UK (the voice of carers)**

A charity set up to help the millions of people who care for family or friends.

20 Great Dover Street, London SE1 4LX

helpline: 0808 808 7777 (Wednesday and Thursday 10-12am and 2-4pm)

[www.carersuk.org](http://www.carersuk.org)

### **Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)**

For advice on a range of issues including money, family and daily life (their website has details of local offices and getting advice by telephone).

[www.adviceguide.org.uk](http://www.adviceguide.org.uk)

### **CRUSE Bereavement Care**

UK's largest bereavement charity. Promotes the well-being of bereaved people. Provides free care, support and information to all bereaved people and for those who are looking after them.

See website for details of local branches.

helpline: 0844 477 4900

[www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk](http://www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk)

### **Depression Alliance**

National mutual support groups for people suffering from depression (over 60 groups across the country). The website contains information and you can request an information pack on depression.

20 Great Dover Street, London DE1 4LX

[www.depressionalliance.org](http://www.depressionalliance.org)

[information@depressionalliance.org](mailto:information@depressionalliance.org)

### **HOPELineUK (Papyrus)**

A service staffed by trained professionals who give non-judgemental support, practical advice and information to children, teenagers and young people up to the age of 35 who are worried about themselves, and to anyone who is concerned about a young person.

helpline: 0800 068 4141 (free from landlines Monday-Friday 10am-5pm and 7pm-10pm, and 2pm-5pm on weekends)

[www.papyrus-uk.org](http://www.papyrus-uk.org)

### **If U Care Share Foundation**

Charity based in the North of England set up by the family of a young man who died from suicide. It has three aims with regard to suicide: prevention, intervention and support of those bereaved by suicide.

[www.ifucareshare.co.uk](http://www.ifucareshare.co.uk)

[share@ifucareshare.co.uk](mailto:share@ifucareshare.co.uk)

### **Metanoia (means 'a change of mind')**

Has a specific page that people thinking about suicide are encouraged to read. It directs people to some of the resources available, including the Samaritans.

[www.metanoia.org/suicide](http://www.metanoia.org/suicide)

### **National Debt Line**

Free and independent advice on how to deal with debt problems.

helpline: 0808 808 4000 (Monday-Friday 9am-9pm, Saturday 9.30am-1pm)

[www.nationaldebtline.co.uk](http://www.nationaldebtline.co.uk)

### **Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide (SOBS)**

A charity that wishes to meet the needs and break the isolation of those bereaved by the suicide of a close relative or friend.

The Flamstead Centre, Albert Street, Ilkeston, Derbyshire DE7 5GU

helpline: 0844 561 6855

[www.uk-sobs.org.uk](http://www.uk-sobs.org.uk)

This leaflet was produced based on information provided by:

- Lifeline Information Service, Australia
- Irish Association of Suicidology
- Colin Neighbourhood Partnership Belfast