

SANE

FACTSHEET

HOW TO HELP WHEN SOMEONE IS SUICIDAL

QUICK FACTS

- If you, or someone you know, is having suicidal thoughts and is in immediate danger, please call triple zero (000) and ask for an ambulance. Stay with the person until help arrives.
- For help and support, call Lifeline on 13 11 14 or Suicide Call Back Service on 1300 659 467.
- If you believe someone is thinking about ending their life, it's natural to feel unsure, upset or even want to avoid thinking about it. However, there are a number of practical things you can do to help, that could even save a life.

LOOKING OUT FOR WARNING SIGNS

Signs that suggest someone might be at risk include:

- Talking about feeling hopeless and helpless, or being a burden
- Being socially isolated
- Having a recent loss — maybe a relationship, job loss, or death of a loved one
- Having made a previous suicide attempt
- Having a friend, family member or work colleague who has died by suicide
- Symptoms of a mental health issue getting worse
- Behaving in a risky manner – such as problematic alcohol or drug use or driving recklessly
- Giving away possessions
- Sudden, unexpected improvement in mood or seeming 'at peace'.

HAVING THE CONVERSATION

Let them know you are concerned

If possible, choose a good time and place to have a conversation, where you are both feeling calm and have plenty of time.

Tell them what you have noticed that makes you worried. This shows that you care, and that you are there to help.

You can also ask how they are going, but be prepared to follow up a “good” or “ok” with “How are you really? I want to know because I care”. Or, you can mention explicitly why you are concerned – like any warning signs you’ve noticed.

Ask if they are thinking about suicide

Ask the question directly; “Are you having thoughts about suicide?” This might feel uncomfortable, but a direct question encourages an honest answer.

Remember, talking about suicide will not make a person take their own life or put ideas in the head. It provides the opportunity for someone to say how they’re really going.

Listen

Listening without judgment can help reduce the shame they may feel about their suicidal thoughts.

Try to understand what led them to feel this way. Saying things like “That sounds really tough” can show that you are listening and trying to understand what they are going through.

Don’t jump straight into problem solving or convince them they shouldn’t have suicidal thoughts. This can feel dismissive.

Encourage them to get professional help

Tell them you understand they are in pain, but that there are options other than suicide.

Encourage them to make an appointment with a GP or a trusted mental health professional. They can take someone along for support if it helps.

You can also contact a mental health professional or employee assistance program, family member or friend on their behalf. Or, support them to make an appointment.

Professional helplines are also available to help:

- [Kids Helpline](#) - 1800 55 1800
- [Lifeline](#) - 13 11 14
- [Suicide Callback Service](#) -1300 659 467

WHAT TO DO NEXT

If you are worried about their safety right now

Many people experience suicidal thoughts in passing. Most people who experience suicidal thoughts do not die by suicide. But if someone is in immediate danger, call 000.

Sometimes, your gut feeling tells you something is very wrong. But if you are unsure, signs

someone might be unsafe include:

- They are talking explicitly about dying, or planning to die by suicide
- They are very distressed, angry, or hopeless
- They are unwilling to get help
- They are experiencing an 'at risk' mental state, such as being affected by drugs or alcohol, or experiencing delusions or hallucinations

If possible, stay with them until emergency services arrive.

Helping someone keep safe

If they are not in immediate danger, but experiencing suicidal thoughts, there are things you can do to help them.

Many of these actions are best discussed with a mental health professional, but you can start these conversations, or check in.

- **Suicide plans:** Sometimes people have made a plan around suicide. Check if they are able to carry out their plan. Do they have a time, place or method of suicide in mind? If possible, work with them to dismantle this plan. Discuss how they could make their environment safer.
- **Figuring out what helps:** Help them brainstorm reasons for staying alive and the people, activities and services they can connect with when they are struggling.
- **Safety plans:** If they don't have one already, you can help them complete a [safety plan online or in a phone app](#) to have on hand whenever they feel suicidal. Make sure you, or another trusted person, have a copy.

Take care of yourself

It can be emotionally challenging to support someone who is suicidal, so it's important you try to keep yourself healthy.

- Don't carry this challenging situation alone. Find someone to talk things over with, like your family, friends a helpline or a mental health professional.
- Keep doing the things you enjoy and that relieve stress for you.
- It's ok to have limits on what kind of support you provide and for how long.

You are not alone. SANE has developed a tool for family and friends of people who have suicidal thoughts or have attempted suicide. Developed in partnership with friends and family who have been there too.

[LEARN MORE](#)

SUPPORT AND RESOURCES

- Suicide helplines: [Lifeline](#) - 13 11 14, [Suicide Call Back Service](#) - 1300 659 467, [Kids helpline](#) - 1800 55 1800

- [SANE's counselling support](#) - 1800 187 263
- [Applied suicide intervention skills \(ASIST\) training](#)