



# Suicide

## Definition

Suicidal behaviour exists along a continuum from thinking about ending one's life (suicidal ideation), to developing a plan, to non-fatal suicidal behaviour (suicide attempt), to ending one's life (suicide).

**"Suicide is not chosen; it happened when pain exceeds resources for coping with pain"**

People who attempt suicide are ambivalent – part of them wants to die but part of them wants to live.

## First Aid for Suicide

**Step 1: Ask, assess and act** (assess the risk of suicide or self-harm)

To assess the risk of suicide – ask and assess how the young person is feeling.

If a friend or family member tells you that he or she is thinking about death or suicide, it's important to evaluate the immediate danger the person is in. Those at the highest risk for suicide in the near future have a specific suicide PLAN, the MEANS to carry out the plan, a TIME SET for doing it, and an INTENTION to do it.

The following questions can help you assess the immediate risk for suicide:

- Are you having thoughts of killing or harming yourself? (PLAN) – this type of questions does not encourage young people to pursue suicidal behaviour. This gives the opportunity to discuss the feeling and emotions surrounding thought of suicide and is often a great relief.

If someone admits to thoughts of suicide, continue listening and ask open questions.

- Current plans: Find out if the young person is thinking about suicide, and if they have a current plan, have they prepared to do something including the *means*.
  - Are you thinking about killing yourself?
  - Have you thought about how you will do it?
  - How have you prepared for it?
  - Have you thought about when and where?
  - Does the pain (mental/physical) feel unbearable at times?
  - Do you feel you have anyone who can help?
  - Have you ever had any help from a mental health provider?
  - When did you begin to feel like this?
  - Did something happen that made you start feeling this way?
  - How can I best support you right now?
  - Have you thought about getting help?
  - Are they experiencing a crisis in their life?
  - Are they feeling helpless or hopeless?
  - Do you know when you would do it? (TIME SET)
  - You are not alone, there are people that care about you
  - You may not believe it now, but the way you are feeling this way?
  - I may not be able to understand exactly how you feel, but I care about you and want to help.

Let them describe how and why they are feeling this way. Be aware of any cultural context that may have an impact on why the person is feeling this way now.

Things to say:

Things not to say:

- Oh, don't say that
- Tomorrow is a new day
- You have no reason to feel like this.
- Think of how your family would feel.
- But your life is so good
- Don't be silly
- Have you taken your medication
- You need to relax

### Step 2: Listen non-judgementally

- Be yourself. Let the person know you care, that he/she is not alone. The right words are often unimportant. If you are concerned, your voice and manner will show it.
- Listen. Let the suicidal person unload despair, ventilate anger. No matter how negative the conversation seems, the fact that it exists is a positive sign.
- Be sympathetic, non-judgmental, patient, calm, accepting. Your friend or family member is doing the right thing by talking about his/her feelings.
- Offer hope. Reassure the person that help is available and that the suicidal feelings are temporary. Let the person know that his or her life is important to you.
- Take the person seriously. If the person says things like, "I'm so depressed, I can't go on," ask the question: "Are you having thoughts of suicide?" You are not putting ideas in their head; you are showing that you are concerned, that you take them seriously, and that it's OK for them to share their pain with you.

Do not:

- Argue with the suicidal person. Avoid saying things like: "You have so much to live for," "Your suicide will hurt your family," or "Look on the bright side."
- Act shocked, lecture on the value of life, or say that suicide is wrong.
- Promise confidentiality. Refuse to be sworn to secrecy. A life is at stake and you may need to speak to a mental health professional in order to keep the suicidal person safe. If you promise to keep your discussions secret, you may have to break your word.
- Offer ways to fix their problems, or give advice, or make them feel like they have to justify their suicidal feelings. It is not about how bad the problem is, but how badly it's hurting your friend or loved one.
- Don't analyse the persons motives
- Don't minimise or brush off the intensity of their feelings.

### Level of Suicide Risk

Low – Some suicidal thoughts. No suicide plan. Says he or she won't attempt suicide.

Moderate – Suicidal thoughts. Vague plan that isn't very lethal. Says he or she won't attempt suicide.

High – Suicidal thoughts. Specific plan that is highly lethal. Says he or she won't attempt suicide.

Severe – Suicidal thoughts. Specific plan that is highly lethal. Says he or she will attempt suicide.

### Step 3: Give reassurance and information

Give reassurance that help is available and that their future may have other options.

If people feel totally alone and without any resources then they are at greater risk of attempting suicide. Ask them:

- Who do you think you can turn to for help?
- What resources do you have to support yourself?

**Step 4: Enable the young person to get the most appropriate professional help**

- GP
- SOLAR
- Crisis team
- Drug and alcohol services
- Family intervention and CBT
- Contact national organisations for help and advice.

**Step 5: Encourage self-help strategies**

- Learn to recognise early signs
- Try to minimise stress positively
- Minimise alcohol and avoid drugs
- Healthy lifestyle (healthy diet, exercise relaxations techniques and enjoyable activities)
- WRAP (Wellness Recovery Action Planning)
- Recovery networks including self-help groups
- Reading about others' experiences

**Useful websites**

Stamp Out Suicide

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

Points of contact for those feeling down, depressed and/or suicidal. Promoting suicide awareness and prevention

Samaritans

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

Samaritans is a confidential emotional support service for anyone in the UK. The services is available 24 hours a day for people who are experiencing feelings of distress or despair, including those which may lead to suicide.

Charlie Waller Memorial Trust

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

Awareness information and resources for those who are depressed. Young Minds Parents' helpline

Offers free and confidential online and telephone support to any adult worried about the emotional problems, behaviour or mental health of a child or young person.

Youth health talk

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

A website with video interviews of young people's real life experiences of health and lifestyle. There us a section on young people talking about their experiences of depression.

Advice and information for parents, carers, teachers, professions and friends of young people at risk of suicide.

### Procedure

- Inform the DSL
- Speak to the student with the DSL present to assess risk
- School staff will continuously supervise the student to ensure their safety. Inform staff that we have safeguarding concerns and the student is not to leave lessons and any concerns must be reported immediately. Do not disclose information via email to colleagues.
- The DSL to contact parents to agree action plan
- Staff will ask the student's parent or guardian for consent to discuss the student's health with outside care, if appropriate.
- If appropriate, refer to SOLAR
- Advise parents to go to the GP
- If parents have significant concerns at home they must call 999 immediately