

# SUICIDE – KNOWING WHEN TO GET HELP

**Young people with depression can have feelings of great despair and distress. These feelings can be so intense that they lead to thoughts of suicide. This doesn't necessarily mean that the person will act on these feelings – it's important, however, that any thoughts of suicide are taken very seriously by the person and their family and friends.**

## WHAT MAKES PEOPLE WANT TO END THEIR LIVES?

Sometimes life can become very painful and problems can seem overwhelming. At some point many young people think about suicide, but most don't plan or act on it. However, for others the thought of suicide might begin to seem like a real alternative to intolerable emotional or physical pain, or to a problem or situation that appears hopeless.

Situations that might contribute to a feeling of hopelessness include relationship break-ups, family problems, sexual, physical or mental abuse, drug or alcohol problems, mental illness (including depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder and schizophrenia), major loss and grief such as a death, and any serious problem that is difficult to solve and won't go away. The problems may not be obvious to you. Mental illnesses such as depression change the way people think, making it difficult for the person to see a way out of his/her problems, causing them to feel pessimistic about the future.

## HOW DO PEOPLE FEEL WHEN THEY ARE AT RISK?

People at risk of taking their own life often feel very isolated and alone. They may feel like nobody can help them or understand their pain. If someone you know is not their usual self, or if they are showing some of the warning signs listed in the box above, you should not ignore it. You need to talk to the person about how they are feeling. Sometimes people become calm

If you think you or someone you know might be in danger, seek urgent help. Call emergency services (000), call Lifeline on 13 11 14 or Kids Help Line on 1800 55 1800, or go to your local hospital emergency department.

## WARNING SIGNS

Warning signs are the earliest indication that someone may be at risk of immediate suicide. They can be a cry for help as well as an expression of hopelessness and pain – if recognised, warning signs provide a chance for the person to get help and for family, friends and health professionals to intervene.

It's important to seek help if you or someone you know:

- feels trapped and like there's no way out
- feels worthless or hopeless, and that life is not worth living
- starts talking or writing about death, dying or suicide
- withdraws from friends, family and the community
- increases alcohol or drug use
- experiences regular panic attacks
- has delusions or hallucinations
- gives away personal possessions
- does dangerous, life-threatening things.

In someone who shows several of these signs, a stressful or traumatic life event or the worsening of a mental or physical illness, can act like the final straw that may lead them to move from thoughts of suicide to action.

In some cases of suicide, there may be no clear warning signs apparent, and it's only in retrospect that they are noticeable.

after being distressed and openly suicidal for a while. While this can be a sign of recovery, it can also mean that they have decided to complete their suicide plan. People with depression and/or anxiety disorders are more likely to have such thoughts.

Visit: [www.youthbeyondblue.com](http://www.youthbeyondblue.com)

Info line: 1300 22 4636

*beyondblue: the national depression initiative*



## WHAT YOU CAN DO TO KEEP YOURSELF SAFE

It's possible to get through tough times by creating your own 'tool kit' of coping strategies, which you can use when you're feeling suicidal or when things feel hopeless. It's vital to sort out the underlying problem – whether it's depression, an anxiety disorder or something else.

### HOW TO HELP SOMEONE AT RISK OF SUICIDE

It's distressing to realise that someone close to you may be thinking about taking their own life. It's often difficult to know what to say and do, and how to make sure the person is safe. Most people who feel suicidal recover from these intense feelings. Family, friends and health professionals can make a big difference in helping people stay safe and to find positive reasons for living.

**ACT STRAIGHT AWAY**, take warning signs seriously and ask the person if they are considering suicide and if they have any plans. This won't put the idea into their head but will encourage them to talk about their feelings. The person's safety is your main concern and you need to do whatever it takes to get them the help and support they need.

The tips in the table above can help you to work out some practical things you can do to help – for example, don't leave the person alone, and remove any means of suicide available (weapons, medications, alcohol and other drugs and access to a car). Encourage the person to get support from a health professional. Try to give them hope. Ask him/her to promise that they will reach out and tell someone if suicidal thoughts return. And remember to look after yourself in this difficult and emotionally draining time.

It's not always possible to intervene. In some people the warning signs of suicide are not obvious and even the most skilled health professionals may miss them.

### KEY POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Suicide is usually the result of a complex set of factors, but it may be just one or two things that trigger a person to move from thought to action.
- Remember that thoughts about suicide are just that – thoughts. You don't need to act on them. They won't last forever and often they pass very quickly. Many people who have had serious thoughts of suicide say that they felt completely different only hours later.
- If you're feeling suicidal, there are many ways to keep yourself safe and work through tough times. Getting help early can assist you to cope with the situation and avoid things getting worse.
- If you have any suicidal thoughts, don't try to manage on your own. Talk to a family member or friend, see your counsellor or GP, or call Lifeline or Kids Help Line.

### POSTPONE ANY DECISION TO END YOUR LIFE

Keep a list of things you can do to distract yourself and use it when the feeling starts to surface. Give yourself time to get the support you need.

**TALK TO SOMEONE** Reach out to others who might help you to see alternative ways of solving or thinking about a problem, and help you to have a more positive outlook.

If you're having trouble talking to people you know, phone a crisis line (e.g. Kids Help Line, Lifeline or the Suicide Callback Service).

**AVOID BEING ALONE** Have someone stay with you, especially at night, until your thoughts of suicide decrease.

### WRITE A SAFETY PLAN

Come up with a plan you can put into action anytime – such as organising that you will ring a friend or family member when you feel overwhelmed or upset.

**WRITE DOWN YOUR FEELINGS** Writing down your feelings, or keeping a journal, can be a great way to understand your feelings, your situation, and think about alternative solutions to problems.

**SET SMALL GOALS** Try to set goals that are achievable for you, even if it's on a day-by-day, or hour-by-hour, basis. And remember to reward yourself too.

**STAY HEALTHY** Exercise and eating well can help you to feel better and manage difficult things in your life. Start by doing something small a couple of times a week (e.g. a 15 minute walk or two or three laps of a pool).

**AVOID DRUGS AND ALCOHOL** Alcohol and other drugs are depressants that make you feel worse. They don't help to solve your problems and they can make you do things you wouldn't normally do.

### SEE A MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONAL

Psychologists, psychiatrists, counsellors and other health professionals are trained to deal with issues relating to suicide, mental illness and well-being. Ask your General Practitioner (GP) or contact a crisis line for information.



#### Suicide Call Back Service 1300 659 467

Free national telephone support service for people at risk of suicide, their carers and those bereaved by suicide

#### Salvo Care Line (Salvation Army) 1300 36 36 22 [www.salvos.org.au](http://www.salvos.org.au)

Offers a crisis counselling service available throughout Australia

#### Living is for everyone (LIFE) [www.livingisforeveryone.com.au](http://www.livingisforeveryone.com.au)

Information resources for individuals and organisations involved in suicide and self-harm prevention activities

#### SANE Helpline 1800 18 SANE (7263) [www.sane.org](http://www.sane.org)

Information on mental illness and suicide prevention

### MORE INFORMATION AND SUPPORT

You can speak to trained counsellors by phoning these 24-hour telephone counselling services:

**Lifeline 13 11 14** (cost of a local call)

**Kids Help Line 1800 55 1800** (freecall)

Information and support is also available from the following websites:

**beyondblue** [www.youthbeyondblue.com](http://www.youthbeyondblue.com)

or [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au)

info line 1300 22 4636

Information on depression, anxiety and how to help a friend

**headspace** [www.headspace.org.au](http://www.headspace.org.au)

Information, support and help near you

**ReachOut.com** [www.reachout.com](http://www.reachout.com)

Information and support for young people going through tough times

The websites below can help you to find health services in your area. They list services that are either free of charge or low cost:

**Kids Help Line** [www.kidshelp.com.au](http://www.kidshelp.com.au)

**Lifeline Service Finder**  
[www.lifeline.org.au/service\\_finder](http://www.lifeline.org.au/service_finder)

If you or a friend want to communicate with someone via email or online, Kids Help Line offers confidential, non-judgemental, emotional support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Visit: [www.youthbeyondblue.com](http://www.youthbeyondblue.com)

Info line: 1300 22 4636

beyondblue: the national depression initiative

**SOURCES** This fact sheet is based on information from:

- youthbeyondblue [www.youthbeyondblue.com](http://www.youthbeyondblue.com)
- Living is for everyone [www.livingisforeveryone.com.au](http://www.livingisforeveryone.com.au)
- SANE Australia [www.sane.org/information/factsheets](http://www.sane.org/information/factsheets)
- ReachOut.com [www.reachout.com](http://www.reachout.com)

