

How to Support Someone who is Suicidal



Before you Start

To update your own knowledge and skills about suicide prevention, consider completing the Zero Suicide Alliance online training course which takes only 20 minutes. The training is for anyone who would like to be able to recognise the warning signs and safeguard someone who could be contemplating suicide. You can access the course on any device at:

<https://www.zerosuicidealliance.com/training/>

You must always take a threat of suicide or self-harm seriously. Talking to someone about their suicidal thoughts will not make them more likely to end their life.

Often the person will not tell you straight away that they are thinking about suicide so you might have to ask the question. Be direct. Ask them if they are considering suicide. Do not say things like, "you're not going to do anything stupid are you?" It is entirely normal to feel uncomfortable having to do this. Listen without judgement, no matter what they tell you. Never criticise or blame.

Things to do

Allow the person space and time to talk. Listen carefully and let the person tell you how they feel. Be yourself and stay calm. Reassure the person they have done the right thing by speaking to you. Call them by their name.

Get help from someone more experienced if you need it.

Say this:

Tell me how you're feeling today. (This is important. Allow the person time to talk and this will give them relief from the feelings they are holding on to. Let them know you are listening by repeating back the key points of what they say)

I'd like to try to understand how you're feeling so I can help

I've noticed as we've been talking that you're saying things like (repeat back the things that are concerning you....life isn't worth living; don't see the point in going on, for example)

Can I ask you if you are thinking about suicide?

If the person says **YES**, say this:

Thank you for being able to share that with me. Can you tell me more about how you feel?

(Repeat back what they have said to you) So you feel (anxious/lonely/depressed) and you are telling me that you are thinking about suicide. I would like to make sure you stay safe for now. Is that OK with you? You are doing the right thing by talking to me about this.

Have you ever felt like this before? What happened? Did you get help? Where from (Mental Health Services, GP, Lifeline etc)?

If the person is in **immediate physical danger** and in need of urgent medical attention, **you must call emergency services on 999 immediately**. Say this:

I am concerned that you aren't safe for now and I need to get you help straight away. You are not alone and I care about you.

Stay on the phone talking with the person until emergency services arrive.

If the person agrees to be referred on for help, the aim is to engage them with a service or a health professional who can give appropriate intervention. Say this:

You are not alone and I care about you

I think it would be good to link you with a local service who can help you better than I can. Can I have your permission to call (Lifeline or Samaritans) and get them to call you back?

If the person is agreeable, you can call **Lifeline on 0808 808 8000** or **Samaritans on 116 123 immediately**.

Thank you (name). I will make the call and one of the counsellors will ring you back.

I will check in with you again tomorrow. Is that OK with you?

Get support for yourself as soon as you can. You have done your best to help the person under very difficult circumstances and you may have saved a life.