

Suicidal thoughts

How to support someone

Suicide is when someone chooses to end their own life. This factsheet looks at why someone might think about suicide and how you can help them. It also looks at support for you.

Key Points.

- People think about suicide for different reasons.
- If you are worried that someone may be thinking about suicide, talk to them. Ask them about how they are feeling.
- Talking to someone about their suicidal thoughts does not make them more likely to end their life.
- You can help someone who is feeling suicidal by listening, without judging them.
- You can support someone to think about other options to deal with their feelings. Such as accessing support from the NHS, charities or self-help.
- Small gestures such as saying 'hello' or asking, 'how are you today?' can sometimes make a big difference to how someone is feeling.
- If someone is in crisis you may need to get help from mental health services or the emergency services.
- If someone tries to end their life, this is not your fault.
- Helping someone with suicidal thoughts is likely to have a big impact on you. Find out what support is available to you.

This factsheet covers:

1. [What makes someone think of suicide?](#)
2. [What are the warning signs that someone feels suicidal?](#)
3. [How can I help someone who is feeling suicidal?](#)
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1. What makes someone think of suicide?

People will think of suicide for different reasons. If someone is exposed to a 'risk factor' it needs to be assumed that suicidal thoughts are more likely to happen.¹

A risk factor might include:²

- difficult life events. Such as a traumatic childhood or experiencing physical or emotional abuse,
- something upsetting or life changing such as a relationship ending or a loved one dying,
- anger at other people,
- misusing drugs or alcohol,
- living alone or having little social contact with other people,
- having a mental health condition such as depression, schizophrenia or personality disorder,
- having a physical health condition, especially if this causes pain or serious disability, or
- problems with work or money.

Can antidepressants cause suicidal thoughts?

There are lots of studies about a possible link between antidepressants and feeling suicidal. But results are inconclusive. It is thought that risk may be higher during the first 28 days of starting antidepressants or reducing them. Someone taking medication should be monitored during these periods.³

Someone taking antidepressants may be more likely to have suicidal thoughts and behaviours if they are under 25. It doesn't mean that antidepressants shouldn't be given for people under 25 but risks and benefits need to be thought about. If someone on medication talks about being suicidal it may be caused by the medication.⁴

Why may someone end their life?

There are lots of reasons why someone may end their life. Some reasons are:

- escape what they feel is an impossible situation,
- relieve unbearable thoughts or feelings, or
- relieve physical pain or incapacity.

What kind of thoughts may someone have?

When someone feels suicidal, they may have some of the thoughts listed below.

- I have let myself and other people down.
- I am a burden.
- I am a failure.
- No one needs me.

- What's the point in living?
- I will never find a way out of my problem.
- I have lost everything.
- Things will never get better for me.
- Nobody cares about me.
- I'll show them what they have done to me.

Some people feel guilty for thinking about suicide if they have people who care about them. This can sometimes make the feelings of despair worse.

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2. What are the warning signs that someone feels suicidal?

A change in someone's personality and behaviour might be a sign that they are having suicidal thoughts. You may be the best judge of when someone you know is behaving differently.

Changes can include:

- becoming anxious,
- being more irritable,
- being more confrontational,
- becoming quiet,
- having mood swings,
- acting recklessly,
- sleeping too much or too little,
- not wanting to be around other people,
- avoiding contact with friends and family,
- having different problems with work or studies, or
- saying negative things about themselves.

There are some indicators that suggest someone is more likely to attempt suicide. These include:

- threatening to hurt or kill themselves,
- talking or writing about death, dying or suicide,
- preparing to end their life. Such as storing up medication, or
- putting affairs in order. Such as giving away belongings or making a will.

Signs that something is wrong can sometimes be more difficult to spot. Such as a cheeriness which may seem fake to you. Or they may joke about their emotions. Such as saying something quite alarming that is disguised as a joke. **Don't ignore your gut feeling if you are concerned about someone.** Some people won't be open about how they are feeling.

A lot of people try to seek help before attempting suicide by telling other people about their feelings. This could be a professional, friend or family

member. If someone tells you about how they are feeling don't ignore them.

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3. How can I help someone who is feeling suicidal?

If you think that someone may be feeling suicidal, encourage them to talk about how they are feeling.

You may feel uncomfortable talking about suicidal feelings. You may not know what to say. This is entirely normal and understandable.

It might help to:

- let them know that you care about them and that they are not alone,
- empathise with them. You could say something like, 'I can't imagine how painful this is for you, but I would like to try to understand,'
- be non-judgemental. Don't criticise or blame them,
- repeat their words back to them in your own words. This shows that you are listening. Repeating information can also make sure that you have understood them properly,
- ask about their reasons for living and dying and listen to their answers. Try to explore their reasons for living in more detail,
- ask if they have felt like this before. If so, ask how their feelings changed last time,
- reassure them that they will not feel this way forever,
- encourage them to focus on getting through the day rather than focussing on the future,
- ask them if they have a plan for ending their life. Ask what the plan is,
- encourage them to seek help that they are comfortable with. Such as help from a doctor or counsellor, or support through a charity such as the Samaritans,
- follow up any commitments that you agree to,
- make sure someone is with them if they are in immediate danger,
- try to get professional help for the person feeling suicidal, and
- get support for yourself.

Remember that you don't need to find an answer, or even to completely understand why they feel the way they do. Listening to what they have to say will at least let them know you care.

If you are not sure that someone is feeling suicidal, ask:

- “Are you thinking about suicide?” or
- “Are you having thoughts of ending your life?”

These questions are direct. It is better to address the person’s feelings directly rather than avoiding the issue. Asking about suicide won’t make it more likely to happen.

What won’t help someone who is feeling suicidal?

When someone tells you that they are feeling suicidal your response may be to:

- try and find an easy solution,
- tell them to ‘cheer up’, ‘pull themselves together’, ‘man up’ or ‘snap out of it,’
- change the subject,
- tell them that they have no reason to feel like that,
- tell them that they shouldn’t feel like that
- tell them that they should be grateful for having a good life, or
- tell them that are being silly.

These responses are unlikely to be helpful. They may make someone feel:

- rejected,
- unheard,
- alone,
- like ‘no one understands,’
- guilty,
- patronised,
- criticised, or
- analysed.

Reassurance, respect and support can help someone to recover from a difficult time.

What if someone is saying they want to end their life now?

Talking about suicide can be a plea for help. Don’t assume that someone won’t attempt to take their own life if they talk about suicide. Always take suicidal feelings seriously.

If you talk to someone about their feelings and it seems as though they want to end their life soon, try to keep them safe in the short term.

How do I keep them safe?

It is unlikely that you will be able to make their feelings go away, but you can help them by:

- not leaving them on their own,
- talking to them. See the beginning of [Section 3](#) for more information,
- seeking professional help. See [Section 4](#) for more information,

- helping them to create a crisis plan, and
- removing items that they can end their life with.

The removal of items will depend on what their immediate plan is to end their life. Examples include:

- sharp objects such as razor blades and knives,
- cleaning products,
- drugs, and
- belts, cords, wires and rope.

What's a crisis plan?

A crisis plan is sometimes called a safety plan. Ideally a crisis plan should be made before someone is in crisis, but it is never too late to start.

If someone is being supported by a care coordinator, they should already have a crisis plan in place. You can ask them to show you their crisis plan. But it is their choice if they show you or not.

The aim of a crisis plan is to think about what support someone needs when they are in crisis. This may include:

- not being alone,
- removing certain objects from the home,
- talking to a certain person or helpline,
- talking to a professional,
- distraction techniques, and
- including reasons to live, such as pictures of family.

Distraction techniques can include:

- Read a book or magazine
- Watch a film or TV
- Go to a museum
- Walk in a green space like a park
- Draw or paint
- Listen to music
- Sing
- Listen to nature
- Spend time with a pet

Remember to write down the names and numbers of people who would be able to help them.

There is no set way for how a crisis plan should look. There is a crisis plan template at the end of this factsheet which you can use.

You can find more information about:

- Worried about someone's mental health?

- Responding to unusual thoughts and behaviours
- Getting help in a crisis

at www.rethink.org. Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.

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4. What services can help someone who is feeling suicidal?

Emergency services and Accident and Emergency (A&E)

If someone is in immediate danger of taking their own life call emergency services on 999. Ask for an ambulance. Or take them to A&E at their local hospital.

Hospital staff will decide if they need to be admitted to hospital or not.

Give A&E staff as much information about the situation.

Crisis team or home treatment team

Crisis teams are sometimes called home treatment teams. They are part of NHS mental health services. They give short term support for people having a mental health crisis.

They are there to try and prevent people from needing to go to hospital. They should be available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Access to the crisis team is different in different areas of the country. You may be able to contact them as a friend or family member. GPs, A&E and the police can also ask them to see someone.

Community Mental Health Team (CMHT)

If there isn't a crisis team in the area you could contact the CMHT. They are part of the NHS.

They support and give treatment to people with mental health issues.

GP

Call their GP if you know who they are. A GP may be able to offer support in a crisis. If the GP surgery is closed there will be a recorded message to tell you who to call.

NHS 111

NHS 111 can help if you have an urgent medical problem and you're not sure what to do.

Dial 111 on your phone. It is a free service. They are open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Recovery or crisis house

Crisis houses help people in crisis. They are an alternative to going into hospital. Usually people only stay in a crisis house from a couple of days up to a month. It is not a hospital but there will be healthcare professionals onsite. Usually a GP or other healthcare professional will refer someone. The NHS or charities usually run them.

They are not available in every area of the country. You can search online or check with local mental health teams to find out what is available in the local area.

Charities

Some charities offer emotional support services. They help by listening to someone's concerns and giving them space and time to talk through how they feel. Emotional support services are not the same as counselling services.

You can find details of emotional support services at the end of this factsheet.

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5. What happens after I contact services for support?

Will they be taken to hospital?

Someone who has tried to take their own life or is showing suicidal behaviours will usually be taken to hospital. They will be kept safe and may be offered treatment.

They may be detained in hospital under the Mental Health Act. But this isn't always necessary.

When will they be discharged from hospital?

Doctors will decide when someone is safe to leave hospital. If you don't agree that someone is safe to leave, discuss your concerns with the hospital. Focus on risk. It may be helpful to think about the following questions:

- What do you think will happen when they leave hospital?
- Why does this concern you?
- What is the likelihood of this happening?
- Do you have any evidence to back up your concerns?
- Do they have support?
- Are there any safeguarding issues? For example, are there children in the house who may be affected?

What will happen when they are discharged from hospital?

If someone still needs a lot of support when they leave hospital you could ask them to be assessed for a package of care called 'care programme

approach' (CPA). CPA are provided by NHS mental health teams. You can ask the hospital or GP to refer them to the mental health team.

CPA means that they will have a care plan and a care coordinator. The care plan will outline all of their needs. Their needs will be both NHS treatment and social care needs. The care plan will explain who is responsible for meeting each need.

Your relative should be placed under CPA if they have been detained in hospital under certain sections of the Mental Health Act such as section 3, or section 37.

What will happen if they aren't taken to hospital?

They might be supported by the crisis team, community mental health team or GP.

If you think that they should be in hospital, ask for a Mental Health Act assessment.

It is best if the nearest relative (NR) asks for the assessment, but anyone can request one. NR is a legal term under the Mental Health Act. It is different to 'next of kin.' The nearest relative has certain rights.

What is a Mental Health Act Assessment?

A Mental Health Act assessment is an assessment to see if someone needs to go to hospital to be kept safe or treated against their will.

How do I ask for a Mental Health Act assessment?

If you are concerned that someone is a risk to themselves or other people you could try and get a Mental Health Act assessment by contacting an Approved Mental Health Professional (AMHP).

An AMHP works for social services but can often be found through the community mental health team (CMHT) or mental health crisis team.

The only way to give someone treatment who doesn't want it is through the Mental Health Act. They will only be detained under the Mental Health Act if they are assessed as a high risk to themselves or other people.

There is no definition for what high risk means. It could include:

- not being aware of hazards because of delusional thoughts or confusion,
- refusing to eat for fear that food is contaminated, or
- threatening to harm self or others due to delusions or severe paranoia.

Think about the following questions:

- Who is in danger of being harmed?
- What evidence do you have of this? Have they done it before?

- How has their behaviour changed?
- When did their behaviour change?
- Are they aggressive? If so, how?
- Have they tried to harm themselves or other people? If so, how and when did it happen?
- Have they stopped eating, drinking or bathing?
- Have you got any evidence to show the changes in their behaviour?

Detaining someone in hospital can be a stressful process. It is usually the best option if someone can be encouraged to get the help for themselves, such as through their GP. Treatment available should be the same in hospital as in the community.

You can find more information about:

- Crisis Teams
- Community Mental Health Teams
- Care Programme Approach
- Talking therapies
- Mental Health Act
- Nearest Relative

at www.rethink.org. Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.

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6. Are people with a mental illness at greater risk of suicide?

People with a mental illness are generally more likely to feel suicidal and attempt suicide.⁵

Research shows that a person is more likely to attempt suicide if they have recently been discharged from a mental health hospital or unit.⁶

What can someone do to try to stop suicidal thoughts from happening?

People manage their mental health in different ways. This is because different people find different things useful. Common examples of how people manage their mental health are:

- support from the NHS. Such as taking medication or attending talking therapy sessions,
- support through social services. Such as having a support worker to help with stressful tasks like form filling or meeting new people,
- support through charities. Such as going to support groups or using emotional support lines,
- support from family and friends,
- private treatment. Such as paying for talking therapy, or
- self-help. Such as exercise and focussing on sleep.

You can find more information about:

- Suicidal Thoughts. How to cope
- Recovery

at www.rethink.org. Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.

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7. Is there a link between self-harm and suicide?

Self-harm means that someone harms themselves on purpose. Self-harm isn't a mental health condition, but it is often linked to mental distress.⁷

Someone who self-harms don't usually want to die. They may self-harm to deal with life, rather than a way of trying to end it.⁸

But self-harm can increase the risk of suicide. Someone may accidentally end their life. Someone who self-harms should be taken seriously and offered help.⁹

You can find more information about '**Self-harm**' at www.rethink.org. Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.

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8. How can I get support for me?

If you know someone who talks about or has tried suicide, you might feel upset, frustrated, confused or scared. These are all normal responses.

Supporting a person who is suicidal can be stressful. And you are likely to need support yourself. You could try the following.

- Talk to friends and family.
- Talk to an emotional support helpline. There is a list of emotional support lines in the 'useful contacts' section at the end of this factsheet.
- Talk to your GP about medication or talking therapies for yourself.
- Talk to their care team or their local council about a carer's assessment.
- Join a carers service. They are free and available in most areas.
- Join a carers support group for emotional and practical support. Or set up your own.
- Take some time to concentrate on yourself.

What is a carers assessment?

You have a right to have a carers assessment through the local authority if you need support as a carer. A carers assessment will work out what effect your caring role is having on your health. And what support you need. Such as practical support and emergency support.

To get a carer's assessment you need to contact the local authority of the person you support.

It's common for people to not consider themselves to be a carer. If you give someone lots of support, such as emotional support, you are a carer.

How do I get support from my peers?

You can get peer support through carer support services or carers groups. You can search for local groups in your area by using a search engine such as Google. Or you can call our advice service on 0300 5000 927. They will search for you.

You can find more information about:

- Carers assessment
- Supporting someone with a mental illness

at www.rethink.org. Or call our General Enquiries team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.

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Useful Contacts

Samaritans

The Samaritans give people confidential emotional support. In some areas they have local branches where you can go for support.

Telephone: 116 123 (UK) (24 hours)

Address: PO Box RSRB-KKBY-CYJK, P.O. Box 90 90, Stirling FK8 2SA

Email: jo@samaritans.org

Website: www.samaritans.org

Saneline

This is a national helpline. They offer emotional support and information for people affected by mental health problems.

Telephone: 0300 304 7000 (4.30pm – 10.30pm daily)

Textline: available through their website

Website: www.sane.org.uk

CALM (The Campaign Against Living Miserably)

They raise awareness of suicide. Their helpline and webchat offers emotional support, advice and information to men and their families.

Telephone for outside London: 0800 58 58 58.

Telephone for inside London: 0808 802 5858.5pm – midnight, everyday.

Webchat: through the website

Website: www.thecalmzone.net

PAPYRUS (prevention of young suicide)

This is an organisation that aims to prevent suicide in young people. It can offer emotional support to people under 35 who are suicidal. They can also support people who are concerned about a young person who might be suicidal.

Telephone: 0800 068 4141. Open Monday to Friday 9am – 10pm.
Weekends 2pm – 10pm

Text: 07786 209697

Email: pat@papyrus-uk.org

Website: www.papyrus-uk.org

The Mix

Aimed at people under 25. Their helpline is open between 4pm and 11pm, 7 days a week. They also run a crisis text service which is open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Telephone: 0808 808 4994

E-mail: through the website.

Crisis text message service: Text **THEMIX** to 85258

Webchat: through the website. (4pm - 11pm, 7 days a week)

Website: www.themix.org.uk

Shout

If you're experiencing a personal crisis, are unable to cope and need support, text Shout to 85258. Shout can help with urgent issues such as suicidal thoughts, abuse or assault, self-harm, bullying and relationship challenges.

Text: Text Shout to 85258

Website: www.giveusashout.org/

Support Line

Support line offers confidential emotional support by telephone, email and post. They try to help people find positive ways to cope and feel better about themselves.

Telephone: 01708 765200. Hours vary, ring them for details

Address: SupportLine, PO Box 2860, Romford, Essex RM7 1JA

Email: info@supportline.org.uk

Website: www.supportline.org.uk

Maytree

Maytree is a national registered charity based in London. They provide a unique residential service for people in suicidal crisis so they can talk

about their suicidal thoughts and behaviour. They offer a free 4 night, 5 day one-off stay to adults over the age of 18 from across the UK. Their aim is to provide a safe, confidential, non-medical environment for their guests

Telephone: 020 7263 7070

Address: 72 Moray Road, Finsbury Park, London, N4 3LG

Email: maytree@maytree.org.uk

Website: www.maytree.org.uk/

Crisis Plan

Who can help me and how?	Who can I call?: Friend Professional Helpline	What would I say to someone else in my situation?
Where can I go that I feel safe?	What have I done before that's worked?	If the suicidal feelings won't go away what should I do? <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Go to A&E• Call 999
What can I do to distract myself?	What things make me feel worse that I should avoid?	Any other helpful thoughts, ideas.

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Rethink Mental Illness Advice Service

Phone 0300 5000 927

**Monday to Friday, 9:30am to 4pm
(excluding bank holidays)**

Email advice@rethink.org

Did this help?

We'd love to know if this information helped you.

Drop us a line at: feedback@rethink.org

or write to us at Rethink Mental Illness:

RAIS
PO Box 17106
Birmingham B9 9LL

or call us on 0300 5000 927.

We're open 9:30am to 4pm
Monday to Friday (excluding bank holidays)



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www.rethink.org

Need more help?

Go to **www.rethink.org** for information on symptoms, treatments, money and benefits and your rights.

Don't have access to the web?

Call us on 0121 522 7007. We are open Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm, and we will send you the information you need in the post.

Need to talk to an adviser?

If you need practical advice, call us on 0300 5000 927 between 9:30am to 4pm, Monday to Friday. Our specialist advisers can help you with queries like how to apply for benefits, get access to care or make a complaint.

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