



HOW TO HELP SOMEONE HAVING THOUGHTS ABOUT SUICIDE

2024

ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

This resource shares warning signs that someone is considering suicide, and things you can say and do to support a colleague or friend who is thinking about suicide. If you or someone you know is in immediate risk of taking their own life, reach out to emergency services for support.

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SUICIDE HOTLINES AND OTHER RESOURCES

Having thoughts of suicide are not uncommon, and there are often resources someone can access for support. Suicide hotlines are available in many places that offer a non-judgmental, supportive space to talk about what you/they are experiencing and how to cope:

- > **International Suicide Hotlines:** Directories and numbers for suicide hotlines different countries
 - https://www.suicidestop.com/call_a_hotline.html
 - <https://blog.opencounseling.com/suicide-hotlines/>
- > The **International Helplines Directory** for resources in your location
 - <https://www.helpguide.org/find-help.htm>
- > **National Suicide Prevention Helpline (in the USA)**
 - 1.800.273.8255
 - Or text LEV to 741741

If you or someone is at immediate risk of harming themselves, it is important to go to the nearest hospital or call emergency services for support.

You can also find and share a copy of our companion resource, ***What To Do If You Are Having Thoughts Of Suicide.***

WARNING SIGNS THAT SOMEONE IS AT RISK OF SUICIDE

Recognizing that someone might be considering suicide can be difficult. Individuals who are thinking about suicide are not always forthcoming about these thoughts. However, there are certain warning signs and behaviors you can watch for. These can be verbal, behavioral, or emotional, and they often signal that the person is in significant distress. Some of the key warning signs include:

Communication Warning Signs	Behavioral Warning Signs
<p>Expressing the following, either by saying out loud or writing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Wanting to die or kill themselves. This might be explicit ("I want to die") or indirect ("I wish I could disappear"). > Feelings of despair and hopelessness. Comments like "What's the point?" or "Things will never get better" can indicate deep despair. > Feeling trapped or unbearable pain: Phrases like "I can't handle this anymore," "It hurts too much," or "I just want it to end," suggest they're struggling. > Talking about being a burden: Comments such as "Everyone would be better off without me." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Online searches for methods of suicide: Such as guns, poison, bridges, tall structures. > Withdrawal: Pulling away from family, friends, or social activities. > Saying goodbye: Visiting or calling people to say goodbye. > Giving away possessions: Especially items of personal value or preparing for things in a way that suggests they are not planning to be around. > Getting affairs in order: Going to the bank to transfer accounts, updating their will, and organizing other affairs can signal that they are preparing to take their life. > Not attending to hygiene: No longer caring about hygiene or personal upkeep. > Increased risk-taking and/or substance use: Reckless behaviors like substance abuse, driving dangerously, or other risky actions. > Changes in sleep patterns: Sleeping too much or too little, or expressing extreme fatigue. > Sudden calmness or mood improvement: After showing signs of being down, a sudden shift to peace or happiness can indicate someone has made a decision to end their life.

SUPPORTING SOMEONE WHO IS CONSIDERING SUICIDE

If someone you know confides in you that they're thinking about suicide, it often means they are interested in being helped. While it can be scary to support an individual who is in pain and thinking of taking their life, there are many steps that you can take to help them. Here are some tips on how to respond and offer support:

Take it seriously

- > **Acknowledge their feelings:** Do not dismiss or minimize what they're saying, even if it sounds like a cry for help. All expressions of suicidal thoughts are serious and warrant attention.
- > **Stay calm yourself:** While you may feel scared or overwhelmed, try to remain composed. Use self-regulation skills like deep breathing to keep yourself calm. Your calmness can help keep them grounded.

Example statements or questions

"I'm so glad you are telling me this. I can imagine this is very difficult for you, and I want to support you however I can."

"I'm really sorry you're feeling this way, and I'm here to listen."

Listen and show empathy

- > **Be present:** Let them talk about their feelings and struggles. Often, just having someone listen without judgment can make a huge difference.
- > **Avoid interrupting:** Allow them to express their emotions, even if they seem intense. Validate their pain by acknowledging how hard things seem for them right now.
- > **Use reflective listening:** Repeat back what they're saying to show you understand, like, "It sounds like you're feeling hopeless and overwhelmed."

Example statements or questions

"Can you tell me more about what's been going on for you lately?"

"I'm really worried about you. It sounds like you're going through an incredibly tough time."

"I can't imagine how painful this must be for you, but I'm here."

Ask directly about suicide

- > **Be clear and compassionate:** If you have observed clear warning signs but they have not yet articulated suicidal thoughts, it's okay to ask directly, "Are you thinking about killing yourself?" This may feel uncomfortable, but it opens the door for them to be honest.

Asking about suicide does not promote suicide or put the idea in someone's mind – it shows you care. Even in contexts where suicide is highly stigmatized, it is important to ask directly, and listen with compassion.

- > **Ask about their plan:** If they say yes, ask if they have a specific plan. Sometimes people talk about taking their life using means that are not accessible (for example, if they talk about drowning themselves in the ocean and they are in a land-locked region, this is not very accessible.) If they talk about overdosing on medication/drugs, it is important to ask if they have made efforts to obtain these substances and/or whether they currently have access to them. If they talk about jumping off a bridge or a cliff, ask where and how they plan to get there.

This helps you understand the urgency of the situation. The more detailed the plan and the more lethal and accessible the method, the greater the risk, and together you should reach out for support to keep the person safe (e.g. suicide hotline, doctor, hospital).

Example statements or questions

"Have you been thinking about suicide?"

"Do you have a plan for how you would do it?"

Offer non-judgmental support

- > **Reassure them:** Let them know you're there for them and that they're not alone. Simple phrases of presence and support can be comforting.
- > **Avoid saying things like:** "You shouldn't feel this way—you have so much to live for" or "there are people who have it much harder than you." Statements that minimize, judge, or offer empty reassurances can make them feel misunderstood or even more isolated.
- > **Do not promise to keep secrets:** While your desire to honor their trust is understandable, their safety must take priority. Emphasize that your main concern is their well-being and that getting help is crucial. Sometimes, people ask for secrecy out of fear, but you can help them understand that seeking help is a step toward safety.

Example statements or questions

"I'm so sorry you're feeling this way. I'm here for you."

"I'm not here to judge you. Many people have thoughts of suicide, I just want to support you however I can."

"I'm really glad you trusted me enough to share this with me. Your safety is too important for me to keep this secret."

"I care about you too much to keep this to myself. I need to help you find the right support."

Encourage them to get help

- > **Suggest talking to a professional:** Encourage them to speak with a mental health professional (therapist, counselor, doctor) or contact a suicide hotline. Offer to help them find resources if they don't know where to turn.
- > **Offer to accompany them:** If they're open to it, you could offer to go with them to see a professional or to make the phone call together.

Example statements or questions

"It is important to me that you are safe, and stay alive. I think it would be helpful if we contacted a professional for support."

"Have you thought about talking to a therapist or counselor?"

"Talking to a professional might really help you. I can help you find someone to talk to."

Do not leave them alone

- > **Stay with them:** If they're in immediate danger, don't leave them alone. Stay with them and, if necessary, remove anything they could use to harm themselves (medications, sharp objects, car keys, etc.).
- > **Call for help if necessary:** If you believe they are at imminent risk of harming themselves, call emergency services or take them to the hospital. It's better to overreact than underreact in these situations.

Example statements or questions

"I'm not going to leave you alone right now. Let's stick together until we figure out the next steps to keep you safe."

"Let's make sure we get rid of anything dangerous nearby for now."

Help them create a safety plan

Share our companion resource ***What To Do If You Are Having Thoughts of Suicide*** and...

- > **Discuss a safety plan:** Work with them to identify steps they can take to stay safe, such as contacting friends or family, avoiding risky situations, or using coping strategies that have worked for them in the past.
- > **Identify support networks:** Help them think of people they can reach out to when they're feeling vulnerable.
- > **Discuss emergencies:** Make a plan for if they are having serious thoughts and a plan to end their life. Program emergency contacts into phone, and write on paper and put in wallet or purse so they have it with them at all times.

Example statements or questions

"What can we do right now to make sure you feel safe?"

"Let's think about some people you can reach out to if things feel overwhelming again."

"What has helped you get through tough times before? Can we try some of those strategies?"

Follow up

- > **Check in regularly:** Stay in touch after the initial conversation. Call, text, or visit them to see how they're doing and remind them that they're not alone.
- > **Keep supporting:** Suicidal thoughts don't always disappear after one conversation. Ongoing support is essential.

Take care of yourself

- > **Seek support for yourself:** Supporting someone through this can be emotionally draining, so make sure you have someone you can talk to about your own feelings, whether it's another friend, a family member, or a professional.
- > **Know your limits:** You can be a great source of support, but if you are not a trained mental health professional you're not expected to be a therapist. Don't hesitate to reach out to professionals for help.

Example statements or questions

"Can I check in with you later to see how you're doing?"

"How are you feeling today compared to when we last talked? Are you still thinking about taking your own life?"

"I've been thinking about you, and I

SUPPORTING SOMEONE YOU ARE WORRIED MAY BE CONSIDERING SUICIDE

The following sections offer some additional guidance for different situations.

If someone shows warning signs but has not disclosed thoughts of suicide

If a friend or colleague shows some warning signs but has not openly referenced thoughts of suicide, you can do the following:

- 1. Express care and concern:** For example: *“I’m really worried about you. It sounds like you’re dealing with so much.”*
- 2. Ask how they are doing:** For example: *“It seems like you have been really overloaded in the last weeks. How are you managing on a personal level? I am not asking to pry, but to see if I might be of any support, or whether I could help connect you to the right sources of support.”*
- 3. Ask how you can support them.** For example: *“I would like to support you however I can. Is there anything that I might do to support you? Your wellbeing is very important to me.”*
- 4. Offer to connect them to resources:** For example: *“Would it be OK for me to help you find the right resources to connect with for additional support? We could search online together for how to get started and who to contact.”* Or, *“If it’s okay with you, I would like to introduce you to one of the counselors that we work closely with from our staff care program. This is a confidential resource and a place for you to speak candidly and get support from someone external to the organization.”*
- 5. Check in and follow up regularly:** Depending on the circumstances this may mean daily until they are connected with other resources. For example: *“I am checking in to see if you were able to make contact with the counselor. Of course, I don’t need any details, but was hoping that you were able to connect.”*

If someone makes vague references to suicide

If a friend or colleague makes vague but concerning statements, ask further questions.

Examples of vague references to suicide include statements like:

- > “There’s no point” or “I just don’t see the point anymore.”
- > “I don’t want to do this anymore.”
- > “I just want it to end.”
- > “I’ve lost all hope.”

If you hear these sorts of statements, **ask for more information**. For example, “*When you say there’s no point, can you tell me more about what you mean? No point to what?*” Or, “*What is it that you want to end? Are you talking about living, or something else?*”

Then, depending on what they say in response, take the steps outlined in previous sections.

ABOUT KON TERRA

At KonTerra, we specialize in supporting clients that operate in complex and high-stress environments where organizations and their staff face difficult challenges.

When staff work in high-pressure roles or locations with elevated exposure to threat, suffering, graphic content, or conflict, they are at risk of experiencing overload, attrition, and stress reactions such as burnout. The KonTerra Group works directly with individuals, leaders, and teams to equip them with tools to better understand and manage the challenges they face.

Providing support in a meaningful way is only possible with the right people. The experience and sensitivity of our counselors, trainers, and coaches allows us to work with clients in a way that is unique. Our specialists all share two attributes which equip them to deliver excellent support: all are veteran mental health clinicians (master's or doctoral-level); and experienced supporting staff in high-stress and high-stakes environments and roles.



Services delivered by our uniquely positioned professionals include:

- Individual Counseling and Coaching
- Virtual and Onsite Training and Educational Events
- Staff Wellbeing Assessments
- Manager Support and Consultations for Organizations and Leaders
- Critical Incident Response Services

If you are interested in learning more about any of the above services, please contact your KonTerra Account Manager or email: info@konterragroup.net.