

What to Do if Someone You're With Is Talking About Suicide

The First Thing to Talk About With a Suicidal Person

The first and most important reason to talk to a suicidal person is to determine if his or her life is in immediate danger. For example, you might ask:

- Are you thinking of taking your life right now?
- Have you put a suicide plan into action (such as ingesting alcohol or drugs)?

If there is immediate threat to the suicidal person's life or anyone else's, you must call 9-1-1 immediately. Emergency responders are there to save any life that is at risk. You cannot handle a situation like that alone.

The First Thing To Do When Someone is Suicidal

The first thing you need to do if you know someone is suicidal is to assess the situation. **If there is any immediate danger to the suicidal person or anyone else call 9-1-1 immediately** or take the person to a hospital emergency room. The suicidal person might initially be angry with you for involving emergency responders but remember, it's much better that they be mad at you than they not be there at all.

What Else To Do If Someone is Suicidal

When you're talking to a suicidal person you want to be calm and make the person at ease as much as possible. Even if you find talking about suicide very difficult, it's best not to act shocked when a person tries to talk to you about it. What you need to remember is that the suicidal person is reaching out and that is the first step anyone can take to getting better.

There are many things you can do if someone is suicidal. The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline lists these dos and don'ts when helping a suicidal person:

Do:

- Be direct. Talk openly and matter-of-factly about suicide.
- Be willing to listen. Allow expression of feelings. Accept the feelings.
- Be non-judgmental. Don't debate whether suicide is right or wrong, or whether feelings are good or bad.

Don't lecture on the value of life.

- Get involved. Be available. Show interest and support. Tell the person he or she is not alone. Tell the person you care about him or her.
- Offer hope that alternatives are available but do not offer glib reassurance.
- Take action. Facilitate the removal of means, such as guns or stockpiled pills.
- Get help from persons or agencies specializing in crisis intervention and suicide prevention.
- Encourage him or her strongly to call the Lifeline.

Lifeline operators help suicidal people feel better every day. (1-800-273-8255)

Don't:

- Dare the person to do it.
- Act shocked. This puts distance between the two of you.
- Be sworn to secrecy. Always seek help and support.

How to Talk About Suicide

In addition to the above tips, remember that speaking openly and honestly about suicide will not increase the likelihood of suicide and, in fact, often helps. Try to avoid judgmental language and use the term, "die by suicide," if possible (rather than "commit suicide"). Do not glorify suicide nor dwell significantly on suicide methods. (For example, asking a person how they might kill his or herself is fine, but describing a suicide method in detail is not necessary helpful.)

Talk about a suicidal person's feelings with open-ended questions. Some examples include:

- When did you begin feeling 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?
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Helpful things to say to a person who is suicidal include:

- You are not alone in this. I'm here for you.
- You may not believe it now, but the way you're feeling will change.
- I may not be able to understand exactly how you feel, but I care about you and want to help.

When you want to give up, tell yourself you will hold off for just one more day, hour, minute - whatever you can manage.

Where to Get Help for Suicidal People

You cannot deal with a suicidal person alone – you must reach out and find help and support, both for you and for the person who is suicidal.

You can learn where to get help for a suicidal person by calling Lifeline. Lifeline calls are routed to local areas and the operators can tell you about nearby resources like crisis or treatment centers.

- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (available 24/7): 1-800-273-TALK (8255) <http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>
- If you are outside the United States, visit suicide.org or IASP to get a helpline within your locality.
- If you're not in the United States, go to Befrienders Worldwide for international information. <http://www.befrienders.org/>

Other numbers that may be able to help a person considering suicide include:

- The Trevor Project line (for LGBTQ youth): 1-866-488-7386 <http://www.thetrevorproject.org/>
- United States Veterans Crisis Line: 1-800-273-8255 (press 1) <http://www.veteranscrisisline.net/>
- stopasuicide.org provides people with warning signs of suicide so you can help prevent others from such an act
- suicidepreventionlifeline.org allows people to call or chat online with a suicide prevention counselor

Additionally, you can do an online search for mental health services through the American Mental Health Services Locator. <http://store.samhsa.gov/mhlocator>

Remember This When Helping a Suicidal Person

Always remember that while suicide really may seem like the best option to a person in a crisis, there are many other options out there to help the suicidal person choose life. There is always another way.