

A Guide for Talking to Someone About Suicide



Start the conversation.

Do some preparation before beginning the conversation.

It may be helpful to:

- Have a list of crisis resources on hand
- Practice what you will say
- Plan the conversation for a time when you won't be in a hurry and can spend time with the person.

Mentions the signs that prompted you to ask about suicide.

- "I've noticed that you have mentioned feeling hopeless a lot lately..."
- "Feeling overwhelmed can be really difficult to deal with..."

Ask directly about suicide.

Using the word "suicide" establishes that you and the person you're worried about are talking about the same thing. It also lets the person know that you are willing to talk about suicide.

- "Sometimes when people feel like that, they are thinking about suicide. Are you thinking about suicide?"

If they say yes, **stay calm.**

If they are in **immediate danger**, call 911. The 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline can be reached at 988.

Listen and validate.

Listen to what they have to say and acknowledge their feelings.

The person may have many reasons for both wanting to live and die. Acknowledge that what they're going through is legitimate. Validate that they are considering both options and underscore that living is an option.

- "I can imagine how tough this must be for you. I understand when you say that you aren't sure if you want to live or die. But have you always wanted to die? Well, maybe there's a chance you won't feel this way forever. I want to help."

Let them know that you care.

Letting the person know that you take their situation seriously, and that you are genuinely concerned about them, will go a long way in your effort to support them.

- "I'm deeply concerned about you and I want you to know that help is available to get you through this."



Create a safety plan.

Ask directly if they have access to any lethal means, such as weapons, medications, drugs, alcohol, chemicals, etc.

Help remove these from the vicinity. Another friend, family member, or mental health professional may be needed to assist with this.

- "Do you have any weapons or prescription medications in the house?"
- "Do you have access to anything that you might use to harm yourself?"

Create a safety plan together.

A safety plan is a prioritized list of coping strategies and resources to turn to when someone is having thoughts of suicide. Ask the person what will help keep them safe until they meet with a professional. There are also online resources available to help you through the process of creating a safety plan.

- "Is there someone you can call if you think you may act on your thoughts of suicide?"
- "Are there any coping strategies you can do on your own to help feel a little better in the moment?"

Visit www.mysafetyplan.org for help creating a safety plan

Get help.



Provide the resources you came prepared with.

Offer the resources you found to the person. Call or text the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline anytime at 988.

If you feel the situation is **critical**, take the person to a nearby **Emergency Room, walk-in psychiatric crisis clinic**, or **call 911**

Offer to help the person find a mental health provider and schedule an appointment.

There are many resources available to help someone locate a mental health provider that's right for them. Reaching out to a counselor can feel extremely overwhelming, so offering to help them make the call can take some of the pressure off.

- "I understand if it feels awkward to go see a therapist. But there is a phone number we can call to talk to somebody. Can I help you call them?"

Visit findtreatment.gov/locator to find treatment near you

Call **211** or visit www.211texas.org to locate community resources near you

Visit www.psychologytoday.com/us/therapists for help locating a therapist, psychiatrist, treatment center, or support group near you



What NOT to say.

Don't argue, threaten, or raise your voice.

Reactions like these can escalate an already critical situation. Keeping calm and being supportive is the best way to help.

Don't ask in a way that indicates you want "no" for an answer.

- "You're not thinking about suicide, are you?"
- "You're not thinking about doing something stupid, are you?"

Don't promise secrecy, even if they ask you not to tell anyone.

It may be necessary to breach confidentiality in order to get them help. They may be upset with you, but when someone's life is at risk, it is more important to ensure their safety.

- "I care about you too much to keep a secret like this. You need help and I am here to help you get it."

Don't debate the morality of suicide.

The person you are concerned about may not share the same beliefs as you. Debating with someone about whether their feelings are "right or wrong" isn't an effective strategy to deter suicide and can leave them feeling even more alone.

Don't invalidate or belittle their feelings.

The simple fact is that people don't choose to feel suicidal; suicidal feelings are common responses to trauma, hard situations, grief, mental illness, and more. Listening to someone, even if you may not fully understand, can make all the difference.

- "Other people have it worse."
- "You're being selfish."
- "It's not that bad!"

Additional resources.

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

A national lifeline that offers crisis support and information. They can be reached via phone call, text, or online chat.

Call or text **988**

Online chat at 988lifeline.org/chat

Crisis Textline

A 24/7, free support for those experiencing any type of crisis.

Text "**HOME**" to 741741

Know the Signs

An interactive resource that provides concerned individuals with tools for recognizing suicidal thoughts and talking with someone about suicide.

Visit www.suicideispreventable.org

The Jed Foundation

A non-profit that works to prevent suicide and support the mental health of teens and young adults.

Visit jedfoundation.org

Suicide Prevention Booklet by the South Southwest MHTTC

This comprehensive resource booklet has many different resources for suicide prevention, including resources for crisis, learning about suicide, how to help yourself or a friend, finding a therapist, apps and interactive tools for keeping yourself safe, as well as resources for clinicians.

Visit <https://mhttcnetwork.org/centers/south-southwest-mhttc/product/suicide-prevention-resource-booklet>