

I'm worried someone I care about may try to take their own life

Are you worried someone you know may want to take their own life?

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Call
Lifeline on
13 11 14
if you need
to talk

How to help

If you think someone you care about is at risk of suicide or has recently tried to take their own life then communication and support is vital.

First, ask them about suicide. This needs to be done directly so that you get a straight answer, e.g. "Are you thinking about suicide?"

If the answer is yes, and particularly if the thoughts are strong, it's important to encourage them to get help for their suicidal thoughts, such as suggesting they speak to Lifeline, a GP or another mental health practitioner or offer to take them to see someone. If someone is resistant to seeking help, you may be able to provide them with information on how they may be feeling, what help is available, who they can call for help, and then following up to see how they went and if you can help them, e.g. by making an appointment, attending the appointment with them.

If life is in danger, you may need to seek help against the person's wishes — if possible, talk to the person about this first.

What is the person feeling?

Everyone is different, and suicidal thoughts and behaviours are complex. It can help for you to understand what is going on for the person by asking them how they are feeling, and what led them to feel this way. If they are ready to talk, ensure you listen respectfully. Try not to interrupt or ask too many questions. Let them know you're listening by your body language and by summarising what they have said where appropriate. It can really help for the person to feel truly heard, and you will understand more how to help them also.

Helping with treatment

How can you help someone to help themselves?

- Encouraging someone to reach out for help any time they need to.
- If medication is prescribed or visits to counsellors are arranged, encourage the person to persist with these.
- Discussing issues that may come up in counselling may be difficult, but depending on your relationship with the person, this might be helpful to allow them to go over things.
- Therapeutic treatment may require the person to go over traumatic events which will likely cause a strong emotional reaction in the individual.

Looking after yourself

Supporting someone who is suicidal can cause a great deal of stress, and can be physically and emotionally exhausting. Preventing physical run down and dealing with your own thoughts and emotions is essential in maintaining your own health. Seek help from trusted friends, family or seek professional help if you feel you are not coping with the situation. This is essential — as you can't support the person well if you are not coping well yourself. There are specific organizations that assist carers such as Carers NSW, www.carersnsw.org.au and ARAFMI (Association of Relatives and Friends of the Mentally Ill) www.arafmi.org. Their web pages provide extensive information to support carers. There are also online forums at www.sane.org and www.reachout.com



"You can't pour from an empty cup"

Part of caring for others is caring for yourself. Caring for someone else can be physically and emotionally draining and you may feel you are on 'high alert' at all times. Finding time to wind down, engaging in independent activities or talking to a psychologist can all be helpful.

Tips to support people

- **Getting information from the source** — Ask the individual how you can help, everyone is different and require different things to feel supported. Feel free to make suggestions of ways to help, but not too many as it may be overwhelming.
- **Check in** with the person in a non-confronting way. It may be easier for someone to reply to a text or email than having to answer a phone call or answering the door. However others may prefer a hug and a chat over a cup of tea so it's always a good idea to ask. Don't create an elephant in the room, ask how someone is if they have been unwell but you can also discuss other aspects of life.
- **Listen** — Create a non-judgemental environment, be empathetic, listen and be patient. A mental health problem or suicide attempt can take time to work through and often create difficult behaviours such as irritability or lack of motivation.
- **Encourage** staying with a treatment plan and making a suicide safety plan so the individual knows where to go for help and how to delay acting on any suicidal thoughts. For more info on safety planning visit www.beyondblue.com.au/get-support/beyondnow-suicidesafety-planning
- **Avoid** telling people that you know how they feel, that it was 'meant to be', that they just need to 'get on with it' etc. it is showing the person that you do not understand how they feel.
- **Positive** — Encourage the person to engage in positive activities, no matter how small. It may be a shower, a chat with a friend, going to pick up bread and milk, sitting in the sunshine, throwing a ball for the dog all of which may improve mood.

Where to go for support

It can be very difficult to know what to do and how to cope, but help is available.

- **Contact Lifeline:** 13 11 14 (available 24/7) or Online Crisis Support Chat (available nightly at www.lifeline.org.au)
- **Use available resources** — smartphone apps, online support groups
- **Talk to someone you trust** — you don't have to go through this alone
- If the person you are supporting won't seek help, seek support for yourself. Talk to your GP or a counsellor about how to look after yourself and how best to support them
- **If life is in danger** — call emergency services 000.

To search for local services and centres in your area visit the Lifeline Service Seeker Directory at www.lifeline.serviceseeker.com.au.



3 steps to help prevent suicide:

1) **Ask** — if you think someone might be suicidal, ask them directly "Are you thinking about suicide?" Don't be afraid to do this, it shows you care and will actually decrease their risk because it shows someone is willing to talk about it. Make sure you ask directly and unambiguously.

2) **Listen** and stay with them — if they say 'yes', they are suicidal, listen to them and allow them to express how they are feeling. Don't leave them alone. Stay with them or get someone else reliable to stay with them.

3) **Get help** — get them appropriate help. Call a crisis line like Lifeline 13 11 14 or 000 if life is in danger. If you can get in straight away visit a GP or psychologist. Even if the danger is not immediate they may need longer term support for the issues that led to them feeling this way.

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Caring for someone contemplating suicide or someone who has tried to take their own life can be stressful and while it is important to support them to get better, it is important to look after your own physical and mental health.



Phone 13 11 14 | www.lifeline.org.au

Call Lifeline on 13 11 14 (available 24/7) if you are feeling suicidal or in crisis or visit www.lifeline.org.au to connect online with our Crisis Support Chat (available nightly), find a range of other useful factsheets and to find local services in your area.

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