



## What to do if someone you know is having suicidal thoughts

What do you do if someone talks about suicide? How do you know if he or she is serious? What if the person just wants attention? How can you help?

It can be scary when someone you know is thinking about suicide. But you don't have to be a therapist to help. The most important thing you can do is listen without judgment, take suicidal thoughts seriously and find help. Know that you can never be "too careful" when it comes to any talk of suicide.

## **Ask about suicide**

Some people are afraid that bringing up suicide can give someone the idea. This isn't the case. Talking about suicide can save a life. If you're worried about someone, take a deep breath and ask the hard questions:

- Are you having suicidal thoughts?
- Are you thinking about hurting or killing yourself?

If the person says "no," you've still helped. You've opened the door of communication. You can talk about the person's sadness, your concerns and what other help he or she may need.

If the person says "yes," take another deep breath. You'll need to ask more questions. Find out if the person has a plan and access to means (like a gun or pills). Call for expert help together. And don't leave the person alone until help arrives. You may need to call 911 if the person's behavior is erratic or unsafe.

## **Listen without judgment**

If you learn someone is having suicidal thoughts, stay calm and show you care. You may have strong feelings about suicide, but keep the focus on the other person. Listen without making judgments.

Depression can be one of the reasons someone might consider suicide. Remember, you don't have to "fix" a person's feelings. It can be tempting to downplay depressed feelings in an effort to help, but this can make the person feel worse. Just listening can make the person feel less alone and less afraid.

Know that if a person opens up to you, he or she is exposing personal feelings. Avoid statements like "things can't be that bad" or "you should never think like this." Instead, express empathy and concern for the person's safety and wellbeing. You can say things like, "This must be really hard" and "I'm here for you."

## **Provide support and get help**

Someone who's at risk for suicide may feel alone. He or she might feel there's no way out of their emotional distress. So you want to convey hope and care. Let the person know you care. Your job is to offer support and connect the person with professional help.

The nearest hospital emergency room is a good place to start. Their staff is trained to assess and help a person who is thinking about suicide. If you're not actually with the person or don't trust the person to go to the hospital willingly, you can call 911. If the person has a plan and means and you're present, you really shouldn't leave him or her alone.

Some people are extremely resistant to go to a hospital. But they might be willing to call a hotline as a "stop gap" measure. The National Suicide Hotline (**1-800-273-TALK or 1-800-273-8255**) is a good option. Or you can text "**HOME**" to **741741** to reach a crisis counselor at the Crisis Text Line.

Remember, you don't have to be a therapist to help a suicidal person. Listen, ask about suicide, show support and find expert help. You might just save a life.