



# Have the conversation

**Suicide is hard to talk about.** It's stressful and uncomfortable for many people. But for someone who's struggling, starting a conversation is one of the most important things you can do.

## Suggestions for Starting a Conversation

### Before you talk:

Learn about which services are available in your community to support someone who may be considering suicide. This will help prepare you if the person needs more help than what you're able to offer. See the Where to Get Help section of this website to learn where you and the person you're concerned about can go for help.

### How to start the conversation:

First, find the right time and place to have this important conversation. Most people will share more in a comfortable, private and quiet environment where you can be alone.

Start by telling them that you've noticed they're acting differently. Share specific things you've noticed and tell them that you're worried about them. Ask if they have anything they want to talk about.

### Conversation starters:

*"Hey, I've noticed you've been acting agitated lately, is everything ok?"*

*"I've noticed you've been joking about wanting to die a lot lately, is everything ok?"*

*"Hey, you don't seem yourself lately, do you want to talk about it?"*

### Listen

You don't have to know all the answers. Sometimes just listening to someone can give them the support they need in that moment.

## Ask:

Start by asking if they're thinking of suicide, even if you only see some of the warning signs.

***“Are you thinking about suicide?” or “are you thinking about killing yourself?”***

Try to use the same words they're using. It sounds direct, but that's because it's meant to be. Try not to replace “suicide” with “hurting yourself.”

Asking about suicide will not put the idea in someone's head. Instead, asking them directly will show that you care and that you're someone they can talk to. They may even be relieved to have the opportunity to talk about it.

If they say they are considering suicide, ask if they have a plan and what the timeline is. If they say they're not considering it, remind them of your concern for their behaviour and encourage them to keep talking with you. Reassure them that you're there to support them through whatever they're going through.

If they do have a plan and timeline, get them in touch with professionals who can help right away or call 911 if they're in immediate danger. If you feel that someone may attempt suicide right away, do not leave them alone. This person needs your support more than ever.

Don't promise secrecy. Seek out the support of the right professionals as soon as possible.

## Share:

Let them know that you genuinely care about them and the pain they're feeling. Tell them you want to help and that there are resources to help them. Remind them that living is an option and reassure them that they can learn to cope with their challenges and painful experiences.

# What **Not** to Say:

People considering suicide are vulnerable and they need your non-judgmental support. Remember, they're sharing their thoughts and feelings with you with the hope that you can help. You can show your care and concern in a way that helps them feel less alone and that encourages them to get the help they need.

Avoid acting in frustration or anger and telling the person to do it. This is dangerous for someone who's suicidal to hear. They need to hear that you care whether they live or die and that you don't want them to end their life.

Don't tell them that you think they're being selfish or cowardly. They're already suffering and they need your care and compassion, not your judgement.

Avoid saying things that dismiss the person's feelings or the reasons they are considering suicide. Try to listen with empathy and take them seriously—this will help them feel heard and understood.

Avoid accusing them of just looking for attention. If a person is talking about suicide, they're suffering. Their painful emotions are real for them and they need caring attention, not dismissal from someone they trust.

**Assess the immediate risk:**

When someone tells you they're considering suicide, this may be a vague idea, a long-term plan or they might be in immediate danger.

**A person should be considered at high risk of attempting suicide if they have:**

- Made a specific plan
- Access to the means to carry out their plan
- Done research into ways to die
- Begun to prepare for suicide
- Rehearsed their plan
- A time chosen that is in the near future
- A statement that they will end their life, i.e. "suicide note"

**Make a safety plan based on the immediate risk:**

If you believe the person considering suicide is at high risk, call the Distress Line (780-482-4357), the Crisis Response Team (780-342-7777) or 911.

Make a plan to keep them safe. Ask if they have access to anything lethal and if they do, safely remove the items or encourage them to leave that environment. Only do so if it is safe to. If they are in immediate danger of becoming injured or dying, call 911 or go with them to the nearest emergency department.

If the person is not in immediate danger, ask what would help to keep them safe until they get the support they need. It might be something as simple as a phone call or weekly coffee to check up on them.

Use resources in the person's network like family or friends and existing relationships with healthcare practitioners. Try to involve others that the person trusts in the conversation.

**Follow up:**

The conversation is a big step and it's also important to follow up with them after to see how they're doing. Some may never consider suicide again whereas others will. Staying in touch will show you care about their well-being no matter what.

**Make the time to:**

- Listen to how they're doing and how they're coping
- Show compassion and empathy for the struggles they're going through
- Ask if they're still considering suicide
- Ask if they've been receiving the help, supports or treatments they need

- Offer encouragement and support for healthy choices and behaviours
- Let them know they matter to you and that you care about your relationship with them
- Encourage them to stay in contact and continue confiding in you
- Share that you're glad they made the choice to live

### **Take care of yourself too:**

It's important to know your own boundaries. No one expects you to be an expert. You're there to support your friend, family member or coworker by listening and letting them tell their story. Recognize when it's the right time to suggest talking to a professional. If you're feeling overwhelmed or unable to help someone the way they need it, explain to them why they need to get further help by talking to a professional.

Suicide is a heavy and stressful topic, and you may need someone to talk to yourself. Seek the support of your loved ones and even the support of a professional if you need it.