

How can I help someone who is feeling suicidal?

If you think that someone may be feeling suicidal, encourage them to talk about how they are feeling. Remember that you don't need to find an answer, or even to completely understand why they feel the way they do. Listening to what they have to say will at least let them know you care.



It might help to:

- let the person know that they are not alone
- make sure someone is with them if they are in immediate danger
- try to get professional help for the person feeling suicidal and support for yourself.

You could reassure the person that they will not feel this way forever and that they can get help, including help from a doctor. If you are not sure that someone is feeling suicidal, you could ask:

- “Are you thinking about suicide?” or
- “Are you having thoughts of ending your life?”

These questions might seem direct but it is better to address the person's feelings directly than to skirt around the issue. Most people do not have this sort of conversation every day and so you may feel uncomfortable and unsure of what to say. This is entirely normal and understandable. However, you can help by being calm, supportive and non-judgemental. Try

to see the world as the person sees it. Try to do this without judging, criticising or blaming them.

What won't help someone who is feeling suicidal?

When someone tells you that they are feeling suicidal you may feel like trying to cheer the person up or telling them that they have no reason to feel like that. These are understandable responses but may not help that much. Someone who wants to end their life will not want:

- to feel rejected by friends, family or colleagues
- people to change the subject when they are talking about how they feel
- to be told that they are wrong or silly
- to be patronised, criticised or analysed
- to be told to cheer up or 'snap out of it'
- to be told that they should be grateful for having such a good life.

Reassurance, respect and support can help a person recover at this difficult time.

What if someone is saying they want to end their life now?

Talking about suicide can be a plea for help. Don't assume that because someone has talked about suicide they won't try to take their own life. You should always take this seriously. If you talk to someone about their feelings and it seems as though they want to end their life soon, try to keep them safe in the short term. It is unlikely that you will be able to make their feelings go away, but you can help by making them see that there are some things worth living for.

It might help to:

- be supportive and accept what they are telling you
- ask whether they are thinking about ending their life now or soon
- try and get a better understanding of why
- ask about their reasons for living and dying and listen to their answers
- try to explore their reasons for living in more detail
- ask whether they have tried to kill themselves before
- ask if they have a plan for how they would do it in the future
- try to make them safe and be open to making reasonable steps to help them
- follow up any commitments that you agree to.

If the person is in crisis, do not leave them alone.

What services can help someone who is feeling suicidal?

Crisis teams are sometimes also called home treatment teams. They are part of mental health services. They help people who are having a mental health crisis. They should be available 24 hours a day, seven days a week and are an alternative to going into hospital.

How someone gets help from a crisis team varies between different areas of the country. You may need to search for a team in your area or call 111 for advice.

NHS 111 is the non-emergency number. It is available 365 days a year and is a 24 hour service operated by trained advisers. NHS Choices is an NHS website that provides information and signposting on a range of physical and mental health issues, and signposts to your nearest support organisations.

Call 999 for immediate, life threatening emergencies.

Accident and Emergency Department - if someone is feeling suicidal, you could try and take them to a local hospital that has an Accident and Emergency department (A&E). Staff can speak to them about how they are feeling and 'triage staff' will decide if they need to be admitted to hospital or not. You can give A&E staff as much information as possible so they can make the right decision.

Rethink advice and information service: 0300 5000 927 (open 9:30am-4pm Monday to Friday)

The Samaritans: 116 123 (freephone) 24/7

What else could I consider?

If you're at work you could contact HR & OD who may be able to get in touch with the individual's emergency contact.

A Mental Health First Aider may also be available to offer the individual support and help manage any crisis situation.

How can I get support?

If you know someone who talks about or has tried suicide, you might feel upset, frustrated, confused or scared.

These are all normal responses. Supporting a person who is suicidal is likely to be a stressful time in your life, and a time when you are likely to need support yourself. You could:

- talk to your line manager, friends and family
- talk to someone on an emotional support helpline (see our [EAP](#))
- talk to your own doctor
- take some time out to concentrate on yourself.

You can use emotional support telephone services, like our EAP, if you want to talk to someone about how you are feeling. You may want to talk to someone about the effect the situation is having on you.

Adapted from 'Rethink Mental Illness Factsheet: Suicidal thoughts – how to support someone'