

# What to do next

Here are some suggestions and sources of support. If at first you don't find the help you need, persist. Try all avenues and don't give up.

## If someone tells you they're feeling suicidal...

- Make sure they're not left alone
- Remove anything they could use to take their own life, e.g. tablets, firearms, rope
- Get medical help immediately

## Get medical help

- Phone your GP surgery (outside normal surgery hours, you'll be directed to an out-of-hours service)
- Call 999 or take them to A&E and **stay with them until they are seen by a member of the mental health team**

## Even if it's only a hunch, share your concerns with others

- Don't be afraid to involve their family, friends or colleagues
- Share this leaflet with others and plan together how you are going to keep the person safe

## Take care of yourself

- Talk to your own GP about your feelings
- Confide in a trusted friend
- Find a support group for carers of people with mental health problems
- If the person does take their own life, don't feel guilty. It is not always possible to prevent suicide.

## Contact confidential helplines and sources of support

**Samaritans**  
116 123 (24 hours)  
[www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)

**PAPYRUS**  
**Prevention of Young Suicide**  
0800 068 41 41  
(Mon–Fri, 10am–5pm and 7pm–10pm;  
weekends 2pm–5pm)  
[www.papyrus-uk.org](http://www.papyrus-uk.org)

**CALM**  
**Campaign Against Living Miserably**  
0800 58 58 58  
(7 days a week, 5pm–midnight)  
[www.thecalmzone.net](http://www.thecalmzone.net)

**SANE**  
0845 767 8000  
(7 days a week, 6pm–11pm)  
[www.sane.org.uk](http://www.sane.org.uk)

**MIND**  
0300 123 3393  
(Mon–Fri, 9am–6pm)  
[www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)

**Maytree**  
**A sanctuary for the suicidal**  
020 7263 7070  
[www.maytree.org.uk/index.php](http://www.maytree.org.uk/index.php)

This leaflet was developed at the University of Exeter Medical School, in collaboration with The Alliance of Suicide Prevention Charities (TASC), and produced by Devon County Council.



**Does someone close to you seem really down?** Might they be thinking about suicide? **The only way to know is to ask**

# It's safe to talk about suicide

# Suicide is rare, but...

- it happens
- there are over 6,000 deaths by suicide in the UK every year – an average of 16 per day.

**Don't think:** "It couldn't happen to us."  
It can happen in any family.

Intense emotional strain and mental exhaustion can cause people to behave in uncharacteristic and unpredictable ways.

**Don't think:** "He's not the suicidal type."  
There isn't one.

## Some things that drive people to think about suicide are:

- Personal catastrophes, such as being made redundant, the collapse of their own business, the break-up of a relationship or being refused access to children
- A persistent sense of worthlessness or failure; uncertainty about sexual identity or personal goals
- Good things happening to other people, such as friends getting married, going off to university or getting new jobs, and feeling left behind
- A combination of the above. A whole series of little setbacks can sometimes be more devastating than one big thing.

# What are the warning signs?

There may not be any. An emotional crisis is not like a heart attack or a stroke, where there are visible warning signs.

People who have reached rock bottom can be very skilled at hiding their thoughts and feelings.



## They MAY be:

- Quiet
- Brooding
- Withdrawn or distant
- Not making eye contact
- Agitated
- Irritable or rude
- Drinking a lot
- Talking about suicide or saying it's all hopeless

## They may ALSO be:

- Busy
- Chirpy
- Living life as normal
- Going to work
- Laughing and joking
- Talking about future plans
- Telling you not to worry about them

**So how will you know if they're thinking about suicide?**

**The safest way is to ask them.**

# Why it's important to ask

**If someone is suicidal, they are likely to be feeling:**

- cut off from everyone around them
- frightened and ashamed about wanting to die
- desperate for help but afraid to ask.

They need someone to start the conversation for them. This shows them that they have permission to talk about it and that they don't have to wrestle with their dark and terrible thoughts alone.

## Some common fears:

**"Won't talking about suicide put the idea in her head?"**

No. If a person is suicidal, the idea is already there. If they aren't suicidal, it won't do any harm.

**"What if I say the wrong thing? It could damage our relationship."**

Showing a person you care about them won't damage your relationship. Saying nothing could result in losing them forever.

It's important to trust your gut instincts. If something about the person doesn't look or feel right, say something.

**Saying something is safer than saying nothing.**

**Saying the word won't make it happen.**

# What to say

**It can be really scary starting this kind of conversation.**

## Step 1: Explore how they're feeling

If something bad has happened to them, ask, **"How has it made you feel?"** They may shrug and say, "I'm OK." If they don't seem OK to you, keep trying, quietly and gently.

Listen attentively. Try to keep the dialogue open by asking questions like, **"How bad is it?"** or **"What's that like?"**

Don't deny what they're telling you, and don't pretend you know how they feel.



## Step 2: Ask the 'S' question

If they give any indication that they're feeling hopeless or can't see the point in going on, ask clearly and calmly, **"Are you having any thoughts of suicide?"**

Don't be too quick to accept denials or joking responses.

