
A SUICIDE PREVENTION
TOOLKIT FOR YOUTH

Youth at risk



centre for
suicide prevention



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This toolkit will give you some basic information about suicide and suicide prevention.

There are a lot of myths surrounding suicide – we'll discuss those and give you the facts. If you're struggling with thoughts of suicide yourself, this toolkit will give you some ideas about how to ask for help and what to say. It will also give you ideas of how to help a friend, and how to recognize if someone may be thinking about suicide.

Finally, this toolkit will give you some ideas of how to find support if you've lost someone to suicide.

References are available online at suicideinfo.ca/youthatrisk.

Are you or someone you know in crisis?

*Call Kids Help Phone at
1-800-668-6868 or text 686868.
If this is an emergency, call 911.*

If you don't feel comfortable calling or texting a crisis line, reach out to a trusted adult: teachers, school counsellors, coaches, family members, anyone you trust. If you're not comfortable opening up to an adult by yourself, talk to a friend and ask them for support.

Keep in mind that finding help is not always easy, but it is available. Don't give up – your life is important!



Other resources

Crisis Services Canada

Crisis line service available 24/7 across Canada for people of all ages.

Call 1-833-456-4566

[CRISISSERVICESCANADA.CA](https://www.crisisservicescanada.ca)

ConnecTeen

Confidential peer support service for youth in Calgary and area and resource for articles about how to stay mentally healthy using coping skills.

[CALGARYCONNECTEEN.COM/BLOG](https://calgaryconnecteen.com/blog)

Hope for Wellness

Online chat counselling helpline for First Nations people and Inuit.

Call 1-855-242-3310

[HOPEFORWELLNESS.CA](https://hopeforwellness.ca)

How to ask for help

Don't blame yourself!
Being unwell, whether physically or mentally, is not a sign of weakness or failure.

Looking and asking for help is a sign of strength. As difficult as it is, the first step to finding solutions other than suicide is to ask for help (Amering & Schmolke, 2009).

Help is always available!

TALKING TO A PARENT, TEACHER, COUNSELLOR, DOCTOR, OR OTHER TRUSTED ADULT.

"I need to talk to you and tell you something important. I'm going through some really hard stuff right now. Sometimes it hurts so much I think about killing myself. I think I need help."

"I wanted to talk to you because there's something in my life that I need help with. I'm going through a lot of painful things right now, and sometimes it gets so bad that I think the only way to deal with it is to kill myself."

"I'm here because I need help. My life is really tough right now. It's so hard that I'm thinking about suicide."

“Hi. Things are really hard right now. I’m thinking about killing myself.”

TALKING TO A HELPLINE

“Hi. I called because I need some help. I’m going through some things that are tough and it sometimes feels like I can’t take it anymore. It’s so bad there are times I think about suicide.”

CHAT OR TEXTING A HELPLINE

“I need help. My life is bad right now and I’m thinking about suicide”

“I’ve been thinking about killing myself. Can you help me?”

What if they don’t understand?

What if the person you tell doesn’t get it? What if they don’t understand how much you are hurting? The most important thing is for you to get help.

Try to make them understand how badly you are hurting and that your thoughts of suicide are real. Tell them you need help. If they still don’t get it, *don’t give up*. Sometimes people aren’t in a good place to help others, or they may be afraid. In other words, it’s not you, it’s them. So don’t give up – talk to someone else. Your life is so important!

Suicide safety plan

If you struggle with thoughts of suicide, developing a plan of how to deal with those thoughts, along with a trusted adult, can help keep you grounded when your thoughts become intense (Berk & Clarke, 2019). Find out more about developing a safety plan with our Safety plans to prevent suicide toolkit. bit.ly/36opMeK

Myths and facts

MYTH
**TALKING ABOUT
SUICIDE WILL GIVE MY
FRIEND THE IDEA TO
ATTEMPT SUICIDE.**

FACT Talking about suicide does not cause people to think about killing themselves. Asking about suicide gives them the opportunity to speak openly about what's going on and shows your friend that you care about them! (Dazzi et al., 2014).

MYTH
**SUICIDE
HAPPENS WITHOUT
WARNING.**

FACT Even when suicidal behaviour seems impulsive, there have usually been prior warning signs and behaviours (Anestis et al., 2014; Rimkeviciene et al., 2015).

MYTH

MY FRIEND WILL BE ANGRY IF I TRY TO HELP THEM.

FACT Your friend might become angry or defensive because of embarrassment or shame or feeling that they do not need help. Even if your friend doesn't accept help, you need to tell an adult you trust that your friend is thinking about suicide (Mayo Clinic, 2018).

MYTH

IF MY FRIEND IS CONSIDERING SUICIDE NOW, THEY WILL ALWAYS BE CONSIDERING SUICIDE.

FACT No, your friend's suicidal thoughts may be related to a temporary situation that is causing them great stress or emotional pain. These feelings will pass especially if they have help working through them (Joiner, 2005; Deisenhammer et al., 2009).

MYTH

MY FRIEND SEEMS TO BE FEELING BETTER SO THEY ARE NO LONGER AT RISK.

FACT Unfortunately, this is not necessarily true. Sometimes when people act like everything is okay, or they act happy after a long period of sadness, they are still struggling. Make sure that an adult knows that your friend is/was struggling with thoughts of suicide (Mayo Clinic, 2018).

MYTH
BULLYING CAUSES SUICIDE.

FACT There is rarely just one factor that will cause someone to think of suicide. People who think of suicide are usually experiencing many negative things, not just one. On the flip side, it only takes one positive thing to prevent people from thinking of suicide. For example, if someone has even one good relationship or one activity that they really love, or if they have one really great personality trait like high self-esteem, this can prevent them from considering suicide at all (National Center for Injury Prevention, n.d.).

MYTH
PEOPLE WHO ARE LGBTQ2S HAVE A HIGH RISK OF SUICIDE THROUGHOUT THEIR LIVES.

FACT LGBTQ2S youth are more at risk of suicide than other youth, but their risk drops when they become adults. This is because adults generally are more accepting of their own identities, and they've usually built up friendships with other people who accept them, too (Suicide Prevention Resource Center, 2008; Veale et al., 2015).

MYTH
PEOPLE WHO ARE SUICIDAL WANT TO DIE.

FACT Most people who die by suicide do not want to die. They simply want the pain of living to stop (Shneidman, 1993).

How to help a friend

All suicidal thoughts or threats must be taken seriously.

If you are concerned about someone, tell an adult about it or call 1-800-668-6868, kidshelpphone.ca

If your friend is thinking about suicide, **do not keep a secret**. You need to tell an adult who can help, even if your friend will be upset with you. It is better having someone angry with you than not having them at all.

You can help a friend in so many ways, including:

- staying with them when they go to a trusted adult for help;
- letting them know you're there by texting, phoning and visiting them; and
- telling a trusted adult that your friend is suicidal so they can help – it's not your responsibility to keep them safe (Mayo Clinic, 2018).

WHAT TO SAY TO A FRIEND WHO HAS OPENED UP TO YOU ABOUT THEIR SUICIDAL THOUGHTS:

"I'm sorry to hear you're going through such a rough time, and I'm here for you. But we need to tell someone else how you're feeling. I can come with you to see the school counsellor if you want?"

"It sounds like things are really hard for you right now. I can't imagine what you're going through, but I know things will get better! Let's text the distress centre to see what help is available. I'm so glad you told me how you're feeling, I've been really worried about you! I feel like it's a good idea to talk to your parents, too. Want me to come with?"

How do I know if someone is thinking about suicide?

There are certain things people who are thinking about suicide may say or do to indicate their thoughts. Be on the lookout for the warning signs.

Things they're doing

Watch for ANY significant changes in behaviour.

SIGNIFICANT MOOD CHANGES

- being really sad when usually they're happy
- being really happy when they're usually pretty down or easily annoyed
- getting angry, annoyed, or frustrated easily

WITHDRAWAL

- staying home more often, not hanging out with friends much
- not doing things they normally enjoy like playing sports, music, or going to parties (American Foundation for Suicide Prevention & Suicide Prevention Resource Center, 2018).

- skipping school more often than usual
- deleting social media accounts

OTHER CHANGES IN BEHAVIOUR

- declining grades
- paying less attention to their personal appearance, e.g. having dirty clothes or unwashed hair when they are usually quite clean
- change of eating habits e.g. loss of appetite or overeating

RISK-TAKING, SPONTANEOUS BEHAVIOUR THAT IS OUT OF THE ORDINARY

- driving while drunk
 - drinking more alcohol or taking more drugs than usual
 - wanting to run away from home
 - pulling dangerous stunts
 - physical symptoms
 - always complaining of stomach aches or headaches
 - always being tired or feeling sick
 - giving away prized possessions
 - asking someone else to take care of their pet
-

Things they're saying

People who are thinking of suicide will say things that indicate they are in pain and want help. Everyone feels these things at some time or another, but when these feelings start interfering with our lives, we need to seek help.

These feelings, and some of the things the person might say, include:

HOPELESSNESS

"What's the point of even trying?"

"Nothing is ever going to change."

"Nothing matters."

"What difference does anything make?"

SOCIAL ISOLATION

"I don't have any friends."

"Nobody cares about me."

"Nobody likes me."

"I feel like I'm invisible to everyone"

LOW SELF-ESTEEM

"I hate myself."

"I'm such a failure."

"Everybody thinks I'm a loser."

PSYCHOLOGICAL PAIN

"I'm so miserable."

"I'm never happy."

"Nothing is fun anymore."

"I feel so empty inside"

FEELING WORTHLESS OR A BURDEN TO OTHERS

"Nobody would care if I was gone."

"Everyone would be better off if I was dead."

"Nobody would miss me if I didn't come to school."

WANTING TO DIE

"I'm going to kill myself."

"I wish I were dead."

"I wish I had never been born."

TALKING OR JOKING ABOUT DEATH

"Why don't I just off myself?"

(March, 2016)

I know someone who died by suicide

Losing someone to suicide is an incredible loss.

No one is ever prepared for it. The aftermath is often clouded by the misconceptions and stigma that surround both mental illness and suicide.

If you are coping with the loss of a friend to suicide, you may have lots of questions. Find answers and support at bit.ly/2BI5w3K

Participating in a peer to peer support group with others who are going through the same experience

will be an important step toward managing your grief (Pitman et al., 2014; National Alliance for Suicide Prevention, 2015). Find a support group at bit.ly/33YGcT6



Find more resources for coping with suicide loss: bit.ly/2PiutKU



Risk and Protective Factors

There are certain factors that can put one person more at risk or less at risk of suicide than another, though it is important to remember that anyone can be at risk of suicide.

RISK FACTORS INCLUDE:

- Mental illness (depression, anxiety, etc.)
- Drinking alcohol and doing drugs
- Family or personal history of suicide
- Physical or sexual abuse
- Feelings of hopelessness
- Self-harm
- Access to lethal means (e.g. a gun, prescription drugs)
- Struggle with gender identification
- Recent stressful events (divorce, loss of a family member)

- Family disconnection
- Having “tunnel vision,” not being able to see past the difficulties of today and into the future

PROTECTIVE FACTORS INCLUDE:

- Positive school environment
- Strong family connection
- Supportive relationships with friends
- Positive relationship with a trusted adult that is not a family member (e.g. a teacher or coach)
- Good self-esteem
- Seeing hope in the future, not fixating on day to day emotions
- Involvement in positive activities outside of regular school hours (e.g. volunteering, participating in cultural activities, sports)

(Breton, et al., 2015; Chen et al., 2009)

We are the Centre for
Suicide Prevention, a branch
of the Canadian Mental
Health Association. For
35+ years we have been
equipping Canadians with
knowledge and skills to
respond to people at risk
of suicide.

We educate for life.



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Mental health for all

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