

Worried about someone?

Here's what you can do.



centre for
suicide prevention

suicideinfo.ca



Online version:

Scan the QR code or visit

atl-as.ca/suicide-prevention-conversation-guide



ATLAS INSTITUTE FOR
VETERANS AND FAMILIES

atlasveterans.ca

1 Pay attention

Any noticeable change in behaviour is a sign someone might not be doing well. These changes could include:

- Saying that their life sucks, they're a burden or have no purpose
- Using more alcohol, cannabis or other substances than usual
- Appearing distant or more tired than usual
- Being more sad, anxious, irritable or reckless

2 Know your role

- You're a friend, family member, or acquaintance - not a counsellor. You're not there to solve their problems or to rescue them. You are there to listen and to encourage hope and support seeking.
- There are different approaches you can take (connector, supporter or caregiver), depending on your capacity. For more information, check out our toolkits for Veterans and Veteran Families (atl-as.ca/suicide-prevention).

3 Start a conversation

A conversation like this needs time and attention, so choose a quiet, comfortable spot where you can have privacy.

- While driving in the car or on a walk
- While doing an activity together (e.g., gardening, shooting hoops, camping)
- At a favourite hangout (e.g., park, coffee shop)
- On the phone or in a private message

Mention the changes you've noticed but don't blame or shame them.

- "You haven't seemed like yourself lately. Is everything okay?"
- "I haven't seen you around much these days. Is everything alright?"
- "I noticed you've been giving away a lot of your stuff. Are you okay?"

Be prepared for a range of responses.

- Some people may get defensive, shut down, brush off your concerns, or say they don't want to talk, while others may open up more easily.
- The conversation may become very serious or intense, so it's important to think through ways to keep the conversation safe for everyone.

4 Keep it going

Ask questions and listen to what they're saying.

- Avoid instantly problem-solving: "The other day you said you feel like a burden to your family... what do you mean by that?"
- Let them know you're there for them. "Thanks for telling me. That can be really hard to do. I'm here if you want to talk more."
- Back them up and acknowledge their feelings: "That sounds really difficult."
- Don't force a conversation if they're not ready: "I'm here if you ever want to talk about it."
- Don't make it seem like they're overreacting, and don't change the subject.
- Be direct in your language. If you're still worried about them, ask: "Are you thinking about suicide?" If they say yes, don't panic.

5 Stick to your role

Do your best to encourage hope and support seeking.

- Ask if they have others they can reach out to for support and ensure they contact those supports.
- If you feel up to it, check in with them often and continue to offer support after your initial conversation: "I'm thinking about you. How have you been since we last talked?"
- Call the **Suicide Crisis Helpline together at 988** or Veterans Affairs Canada crisis line at **1-800-268-7708**.
- If they have immediate plans to die, contact **911** and ensure they're not left alone.

6 Look after yourself, too

Your own wellbeing is a priority.

- Acknowledge that whatever range of emotions you may be feeling is completely normal.
- Do something you enjoy after your conversation.