How to Talk to a Loved One About Suicide

Warning signs that a person may be experiencing a mental health crisis:

- Talks about or threatens to hurt or kill themselves
- Talks about or threatens to hurt or kill others
- Inability to function or care for basic needs such as sleeping, eating etc.
- Feeling hopeless, helpless, trapped, losing control, worthless, anxious, or angry
- Withdrawing from friends, family, or activities
- Noticeable changes in mood
- No sense of purpose in life or having reasons to live
- Engaging in risky behaviors such as use of alcohol or other drugs
- Talking about death or researching ways to die
- Giving away prized possessions or seeking out long term care for pets
- Putting personal affairs in order
- Stockpiling medications or acquiring a firearm

Starting the Conversation

Talk openly and honestly about your concerns and ask direct questions about suicide, “Are you thinking about suicide?” or “Are you thinking about killing yourself?” Avoid using the word “harm,” as it is less direct. If you cannot ask the question yourself, find someone who can.

Be supportive in helping them cope with their feelings and offer your full attention. Make sure you have plenty time to listen to the problem at hand. Avoid giving advice or rushing to judgment. Remind them they are not alone.

If They are Experiencing Thoughts of Suicide

- Ask if they have thought of a plan, or have taken any steps to complete the plan.
- Help separate them from the items they plan to use to hurt themselves.
- Help connect them to a mental health professional or the **988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline.**
- Do not leave them alone if they are experiencing thoughts of suicide.
- Remember to follow up with them on a regular basis to ensure they know you care and are there to help them.

For more information on suicide prevention, call 988, visit the Helpline Center’s Suicide Prevention site, or search our online database:

- www.helplinecenter.org/9-8-8
    - Enter your Zip Code
        - Select the following categories:
            - Suicide Prevention and Support
            - Crisis
            - Mental Health

Sources:

- Helpline Center Suicide Information https://www.helplinecenter.org/suicide-and-crisis-support/suicide-information/
- American Association of Suicidology https://suicidology.org/
- South Dakota Suicide Prevention https://sdsuicideprevention.org/

Disclaimer: This HelpSheet is developed by the Helpline Center for informational purposes only. HelpSheets provide a brief overview of the designated topic. For more information, call 211 or text your zip code to 898211.

Updated June 2025