

Suicide

Suicide. It's a difficult topic to bring up. However, when someone talks about suicide or brings up concern for a loved one, it's important to take action and seek help quickly.

What is suicide?

Suicide means that someone ends their life on purpose. However, people who die by suicide or attempt suicide may not really want to end their life. Suicide may seem like the only way to deal with difficult feelings or situations.

Who does it affect?

About 4,000 Canadians die by suicide every year. Suicide is the second-most common cause of death among young people, but men in their 40s and 50s have the highest rate of suicide. While women are three to four times more likely to attempt suicide than men, men are three times more likely to die by suicide than women.

Suicide is a complicated issue. People who die by suicide or attempt suicide usually feel overwhelmed, hopeless, helpless, desperate, and alone. In some rare cases, people who experience psychosis (losing touch with reality) may hear voices that tell them to end their life.

Many different situations and experiences can lead someone to consider suicide. Known risk factors for suicide include:

- A previous suicide attempt
- Family history of suicidal behaviour
- A serious physical or mental illness
- Problems with drugs or alcohol
- A major loss, such as the death of a loved one, unemployment, or divorce
- Major life changes or transitions, like those experienced by teenagers and seniors
- Social isolation or lack of a support network
- Family violence
- Access to the means of suicide

While we often think of suicide in relation to depression, anxiety, and substance use problems, any mental illness may increase the risk of suicide. It's also important to remember that suicide may not be related to any mental illness.

What are the warning signs?

Major warning signs of suicide spell IS PATH WARM:

I Ideation: thinking about suicide

S Substance use: problems with drugs or alcohol

P Purposelessness: feeling like there is no purpose in life or reason for living

A Anxiety: feeling intense anxiety or feeling overwhelmed and unable to cope

T Trapped: feeling trapped or feeling like there is no way out of a situation

H Hopelessness or Helplessness: feeling no hope for the future, feeling like things will never get better

W Withdrawal: avoiding family, friends, or activities

A Anger: feeling unreasonable anger

R Recklessness: engaging in risky or harmful activities normally avoided

M Mood change: a significant change in mood

How can I reduce the risk of suicide?

Though not all suicides can be prevented, some strategies can help reduce the risk. All of these factors are linked to well-being. These strategies include:

- Seeking treatment, care and support for mental health concerns and building a good relationship with a doctor or other health professionals
- Building social support networks, such as family, friends, a peer support or support group, or connections with a cultural or faith community
- Learning good coping skills to deal with problems, and trusting in coping abilities

When a person receives treatment for a mental illness, it can still take time for thoughts of suicide to become manageable and stop. Good treatment is very important, but it may not immediately eliminate the risk of suicide. It's important to stay connected with a care team, monitor for thoughts of suicide, and seek extra help if it's needed. Community-based programs that help people manage stress or other daily challenges can also be very helpful.

What can I do if I experience thoughts of suicide?

Thoughts of suicide are distressing. It's important to talk about your experiences with your doctor, mental health care team, or any other person you trust. They can help you learn skills to cope and connect you to useful groups or resources. Some people find it helpful to schedule frequent appointments with care providers or request phone support. Other things that you can do include:

- Calling a crisis telephone support line
- Connecting with family, friends, or a support group. It can be helpful to talk with others who have experienced thoughts of suicide to learn about their coping strategies

- Contacting our EFAP provider:
 - Canada: Call 1-877-847-4525
 - United States: Call 1-800-466-8282

If you're in crisis and aren't sure what to do, you can always call 9-1-1 or go to your local emergency room.

Some people find a safety plan useful. A safety plan is a list of personal strategies to use if you think you are at risk of hurting or ending your life. You can create a plan on your own, with a loved one, or with your mental health care team. Your plan may include:

- Activities that calm you or take your mind off your thoughts
- Your own reasons for living
- Key people to call if you're worried about your safety
- Phone numbers for local crisis or suicide prevention helplines
- A list of safe places to go if you don't feel safe at home

How can I help someone considering suicide?

If you're concerned about someone else, talk with them. Ask them directly if they're thinking about suicide. Talking about suicide won't give them the idea. If someone is seriously considering suicide, they may be relieved that they can talk about it.

If someone says that they're thinking about ending their life, it's important to ask them if they have a plan. If they have a plan and intend to end their life soon, connect with crisis services or supports right away. Many areas have a crisis, distress, or suicide helpline, but you can always call 9-1-1 if you don't know who to call. Stay with them while you make the call, and don't leave until the crisis line or emergency responders say you can leave.

The two most important things you can do are listen and help them connect with mental health services.

Listening

Here are tips for talking with someone considering suicide:

- Find a private place and let them take as much time as they need.
- Take them seriously and listen without judgement; their feelings are very real.
- Keep your word and don't make promise you can't keep or don't intend to keep.
- Tell them that they are important and that you care about them.

Supports

If they already sees a doctor or other mental health service provider, it's important that they tell their service provider about any thoughts of suicide they may have been having. Depending on your relationship, you can offer to help by helping them schedule appointments or by taking them to their appointments, for example.

If they doesn't see a mental health service provider, you can give them the phone number for a local crisis line and encourage them to see their doctor. They may also be able to access services through their school, workplace, cultural or faith community.

Supporting someone considering suicide can be a difficult experience for anyone, so it's important to take care of your own mental health during this time and seek support if you need it.