



It's OK to talk about suicide

It's not always easy to realise that someone may be thinking about suicide. Unless someone tells you, the only way to know if they are thinking about suicide is to ask.

Suicide is preventable.

Talking about suicide can save a life.

Nearly 1 in 4

young people aged 24-30 will experience thoughts of suicide*.

However, most people who consider suicide do not make an attempt**

*Papyrus

** Samaritans

Figures show

95 recorded university student suicides

for 12 months until July 2017 in England and Wales*

*The Office of National Statistics

Suicide is the

leading cause of death

for young people in the UK, and for men aged 20-45*

*Papyrus and CALM

Students disclosing mental health problems have

increased five times over a decade*

*IPPR, 2017

The factors leading to suicide and suicidal thoughts are complex and uniquely personal. A series of small or seemingly insignificant issues may put an individual at risk, just as much as a life-changing event.

However, there are some risk factors that may have an influence, e.g.

- > **Drug and alcohol misuse.**
- > **Family breakdown.**
- > **History of trauma, abuse, or violence.**
- > **Anticipated or actual losses or life stresses.**
- > **Social isolation.**
- > **Prior suicide attempts.**
- > **Money problems.**

People with a diagnosed mental health condition may also be at a higher risk of suicide. However, most people with a mental health condition will not die by suicide.



How do I know if someone is suicidal?

It's not always easy. There may be indications that someone is feeling suicidal, such as uncharacteristic or unpredictable behaviour, but the signs may also be subtle or deliberately hidden.

These are potential indicators of suicidal thoughts or feelings (although they may not always be related to suicidal thoughts):

- > **Talking about suicide**
Any talk about suicide, death, or self-harm, such as *"I wish I hadn't been born," "If I see you again..."* and *"I'd be better off dead."*
- > **Preoccupation with death**
Unusual focus on death, dying, or violence. Writing poems or stories about death.
- > **Seeking out lethal means**
Looking for ways to kill themselves.
- > **No hope for the future**
Feelings of hopelessness and being trapped (*"There's no way out"*). Belief that things will never get better or change.
- > **Self-loathing, self-hatred**
Feelings of worthlessness, guilt, shame, and self-hatred. Feeling like a burden (*"Others would be better off without me"*).
- > **Getting affairs in order**
Making out a will. Giving away prized possessions. Making arrangements for family members.
- > **Saying goodbye**
Unusual or unexpected visits or calls to family and friends. Saying goodbye to people as if they won't be seen again.
- > **Withdrawing from others**
Withdrawing from friends, family, or society. Increasing social isolation. Desire to be left alone.
- > **Self-destructive behaviour**
Increased alcohol or drug use, reckless driving, unsafe sex. Taking unnecessary risks as if they have a "death wish."
- > **Sudden sense of calm**
A sudden sense of calm and happiness after being extremely depressed can mean that the person has made a decision to attempt suicide.

However, someone at a very low point may be skilled at suppressing signs and even appear happy and no different to usual.

Unless someone tells you, the only way to know if they are thinking about suicide is to ask.

Why it's important to ask

There is still considerable stigma around talking about suicide. Someone who is thinking about suicide is likely to be feeling:

- > Lonely / isolated
- > Frightened
- > Ashamed
- > Unable to ask for help, however desperately they need it.

Listening can help save a life.

By listening you are giving someone the space and opportunity to start to share their thoughts. Active listening requires you to concentrate, understand, respond and remember what is being said.

Talking about suicide does not make it more likely to happen

Sometimes people are reluctant to ask directly about suicide because they think they will put the idea in the person's head – but this isn't the case. Similarly, if a person is suicidal, asking them about suicidal thoughts will not increase the risk that they will act on these.

Talking about suicide reduces stigma and is often the first step to recovery

It is more important to be genuinely caring than to say 'all the right things'. Try to be supportive and understanding and listen actively to the person with undivided attention.

Starting a conversation about suicide

A conversation about suicide can be scary and painful, both for the person who is suicidal and for the person who is asking. Ask how they are feeling and be patient. You may not get much of a response at first. Calmly and gently give them the time and space to start to talk. Resist the temptation to rush in and suggest what to do.

1. Ask open questions (i.e., questions that cannot be simply answered with 'yes' or 'no', such as: *'How are you feeling?'*, *'How did that make you feel?'*) to encourage the person to talk.
2. If you have real concerns that they are at their lowest point or feeling hopeless, ask clearly and calmly:

“Are you having any thoughts of suicide?”

or

“Are you thinking about ending your life?”

3. If they dismiss this question, or try to laugh it off, don't be too quick to move on. You could suggest that they still consider getting help. You may feel worried that you will say the wrong thing. You don't have to make everything better there and then. Simply let them know you are there for them and that you understand things are hard right now.

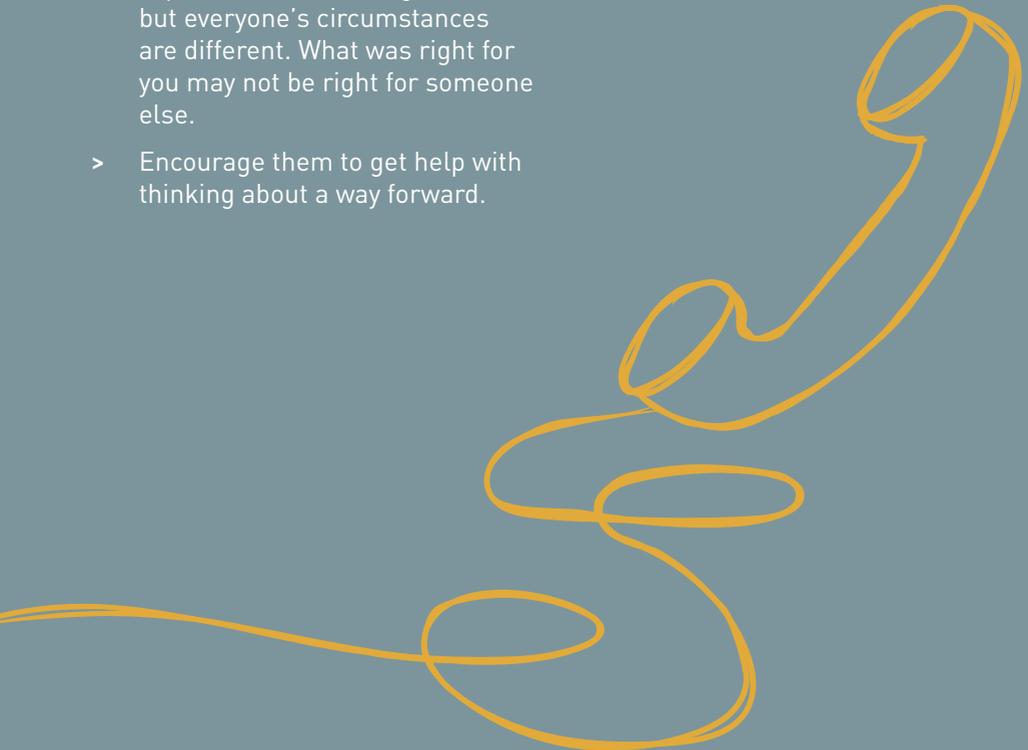


What if someone says they are suicidal?

- > If someone does say that they are feeling suicidal, stay as calm and present as you can.
- > **Take them seriously** – always assume that someone is telling the truth about their suicidal feelings as people can and do act upon them.
- > **Listen to them** – simply giving someone the space and time to talk about their feelings can be helpful in itself.
- > Avoid debating the value of life, minimising their problems or giving advice. You may think that you understand or have experienced something similar, but everyone's circumstances are different. What was right for you may not be right for someone else.
- > Encourage them to get help with thinking about a way forward.

Make sure they know where and how to get help

- > It can be overwhelming for someone to take the first step to get help. They may need your support.
- > Ask them if they would like some support and whether you can help with this, e.g. by contacting a family member or signposting them to services.
- > If someone is reluctant to get help, let them know that you are there for them. Give them information on support services for when they are ready.
- > Check back with them later. Show them you are concerned for their welfare.



Share your concerns with others

Make sure you are not holding your concerns on your own. Even if you are not completely sure that someone is suicidal, it will be helpful to involve others who are close to the person.

You must never agree to keep a plan for suicide or risk of suicide a secret. If the individual refuses to give permission to disclose information about their suicidal thoughts, then you may need to breach their confidentiality in order to ensure their safety. It is better to have the person angry at you for sharing their suicidal thoughts without their permission, than to lose the person to suicide.

Look after yourself as well

After helping someone who is suicidal, make sure you take care of yourself. Acknowledge and accept what your limits are in terms of the support you yourself can offer, but reassure the person that you can help them access other forms of support. Top tips include

- > **Talking about how you're feeling** – with a family member, or trusted friend/colleague, your manager or your GP. If you feel you need something, other internal and external service services are available, including those listed below.
- > **Take a break and make time for yourself** - you may not be able to take a break every time you need one but it's important to have some time that is yours.
- > **Ask for help if you need it** – this could be from your Course team, frontline services or specialist services as part of the University's Student Support Network.
- > **Look after your physical health** – this includes eating and drinking healthily, being active and getting enough sleep.
- > **Learn a relaxation technique** – these can include breathing and mindfulness, and can also be active including gentle exercise, spending time in nature or getting creative.

Further support

These agencies, websites, helplines and apps work to promote mental wellbeing and prevent suicide and are also sources of help and advice:

Kooth Student

Our University has an online counselling platform for our students
Mon – Fri: 12pm – 10pm
Sat – Sun: 6pm – 10pm
student.kooth.com

Samaritans

'Whatever you're going through, a Samaritan will face it with you.'
116 123, free to call 24/7, 365 days a year
jo@samaritans.org
Drop in at 93 Clarendon Road
9am – 9pm, each day

MindWell

www.mindwell-leeds.org.uk
The mental health website for people in Leeds. It provides a single 'go to' place for information about:

- Support and services in the city.
- Self-help tools including coping strategies for problems like anxiety and stress.
- Ways to take care of your physical and emotional health.
- Help for what to do in a mental health crisis.

Well-bean

Hope in a Crisis Café, Leeds
07760 173 476
Sat – Wed: 6pm-midnight

PAPYRUS

Prevention of Young Suicide
0800 068 41 41
Mon-Fri: 10am – 5pm & 7pm – 10pm
Weekends: 2pm – 5pm
www.papyrus-uk.org

Staying alive app

Essential suicide prevention for every day life

Staying safe website

Staying safe from suicidal thoughts
www.stayingsafe.net

Connect Helpline (Leeds)

0808 800 1212
6pm – 2 am, 365 days a year

Shout

For support in a crisis, text Shout to 85258
www.giveusashout.org

CALM

Campaign Against Living Miserably
0800 58 58 58
5pm – midnight, 365 days a year
www.thecalmzone.net

SANELine

A national out of hours mental health helpline.
0300 304 7000
4.30pm – 10.30pm, 365 days a year

The Mix

0808 808 4994
4pm-11pm, 365 days a year
www.themix.org.uk

This booklet is supported by:



Mental health information
for everyone in Leeds

