



Helping a Loved One Who is Suicidal

If a friend or family member shows signs of suicidal tendencies, knowing how to talk to them can make a significant difference in outcomes. The key to successfully intervening is to approach the conversation with empathy and understanding. To effectively probe deeper into their feelings and encourage them to open up, express your concern directly and compassionately. To start, you might say, “I’ve noticed you’ve been really down lately, and I’m worried about you. How are you feeling?” Taking this approach can help open the door for them to share their emotions honestly.

It’s vital to take action when you sense someone is in distress. It’s a myth that those who are suicidal don’t seek help—but 54% of individuals who have died by suicide had never been evaluated for a mental health disorder. Many reach out to friends and family before contacting a mental health professional. Treat this situation as an emergency because it is a matter of life and death. After initiating the conversation, choose the appropriate intervention method:

Option 1: Ensure they see a therapist.

If your friend or loved one has expressed suicidal thoughts in the past but seems to be doing better, ensure they talk to a therapist. If they are depressed but don’t currently have suicidal thoughts, encourage them to make an appointment as soon as possible.

Option 2: Seek immediate help.

If you feel unsure about the person’s immediate safety and cannot create a solid safety plan with them, get them to a hospital immediately. If the person refuses help and you believe they are at immediate risk, call 911 to transport by ambulance.

If you are a child or teenager, tell an adult (parent, teacher, school counselor, therapist, doctor, church leader, family friend) about your concern. Even if your friend asks you not to tell anyone, it’s better to play it safe.

What shouldn’t I do?

Avoid the following, as they may harm your friend and worsen the situation:

“Your life isn’t that bad!” Their pain is real—dismissing it can make them feel judged.

“You don’t really want to die…” Take their words seriously and make them feel safe to open up.

“You have too much to live for.” This undermines their feelings. They may not see their reasons to live.

“Everybody’s got their problems.” This can increase their sense of shame and isolation.

Listening with empathy and leading someone to appropriate resources and professional help can provide the immediate support they need. Your intervention could be a crucial step in helping save a life.

#StopSuicide

If you or someone you know is in crisis, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 9-8-8 or 800-273-8255.

