

## Dealing with Suicidal Thoughts

Many young people experience suicidal thoughts at some point. Feeling suicidal does not mean that you are weak or flawed. It only means that you have more pain than you can cope with at the time. This pain can seem overwhelming. At times, it may feel like you are without any hope and you think about taking your own life.

If you are unable to think of solutions other than suicide, it is not that other solutions don't exist, but rather that you are currently unable to see them.

The intense emotional pain that you're experiencing right now can distort your thinking so it becomes harder to see possible solutions to problems, or to connect with those who can offer support.

Although it might seem as if your pain and unhappiness will never end, it is important to know that how you feel now will change over time. These thoughts will pass and unexpected positive events will occur.

**Suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem. Give yourself the time necessary for things to change and the pain to subside.**

With time and support, you can overcome your problems and the pain and your suicidal feelings will pass. What you're experiencing can be treated and hope can be renewed.

Whatever your situation, there are people who need you and want you around. There are places where you can make a difference, and experiences to be enjoyed that can remind you that life is worth living.

It takes real courage to step back from the brink. You can use that courage to face life, to learn coping skills for overcoming your low emotions, and for finding the strength to keep going:

1. Your emotions are not fixed - they are constantly changing. How you feel today may not be the same as how you felt yesterday or how you'll feel tomorrow or next week.
2. You are loved and wanted by many.
3. Your absence would create grief and anguish in the lives of friends and loved ones.
4. There are many things you can and will accomplish in your life.
5. There are sights, sounds, and experiences in life there to delight and lift you.
6. Your ability to experience pleasurable emotions is equal to your ability to experience distressing emotions.

**A suicidal crisis is almost always temporary. Even problems that seem hopeless have solutions.**

Therapists, counsellors, friends or loved ones can help you to see solutions that otherwise may not be apparent to you. Give them a chance to help.

Mental health conditions are all treatable with changes in lifestyle, therapy, and medication. Most people who seek help can improve their situation and recover.

If you are experiencing a suicidal crisis, take these immediate actions:

**Step 1: Promise not to do anything right now**

- Even though you're in a lot of pain right now, give yourself some distance between thoughts and action. Make a promise to yourself: "I will wait 24 hours and won't do anything drastic during that time." Or, wait a week.
- Thoughts and actions are two different things—your suicidal thoughts do not have to become a reality. There is no deadline, no one's pushing you to act on these thoughts immediately. Wait. Wait and put some distance between your suicidal thoughts and suicidal action.

**Step 2: Avoid drugs and alcohol**

- Suicidal thoughts can become even stronger if you have taken drugs or alcohol. It is important to not use non-prescription drugs or alcohol when you feel hopeless or are thinking about suicide.

**Step 3: Make your home safe**

- Remove things you could use to hurt yourself, such as pills, knives, razors, or firearms. If you are unable to do so, go to a place where you can feel safe. If you are thinking of taking an overdose, give your medicines to someone who can return them to you one day at a time as you need them.

**Step 4: Don't keep these suicidal feelings to yourself**

- Many of us have found that the first step to coping with suicidal thoughts and feelings is to share them with someone we trust. It may be a family member, friend, therapist, member of the clergy, teacher, family doctor, coach, or an experienced counsellor at the end of a helpline. Find someone you trust and let them know how bad things are. Don't let fear, shame, or embarrassment prevent you from seeking help. Just talking about how you got to this point in your life can release a lot of the pressure that's building up and help you find a way to cope.

**Step 5: Take hope - people DO get through this**

- Even people who feel as badly as you are feeling now manage to survive these feelings. Take hope in this. There is a very good chance that you are going to live through these feelings, no matter how much self-loathing, hopelessness, or isolation you are currently experiencing. Just give yourself the time needed and don't try to go it alone.

**Even when you've decided who you can trust to talk to, admitting your suicidal thoughts to another person can be difficult.**

- Tell the person exactly what you are telling yourself. If you have a suicide plan, explain it to them.
- Phrases such as, 'I can't take it anymore' or 'I'm done' are vague and do not illustrate how serious things really are. Tell the person you trust that you are thinking about suicide.

- If it is too difficult for you to talk about, try writing it down and handing a note to the person you trust. Or send them an email or text and sit with them while they read it.
- If the first person you reached out to does not seem to understand, tell someone else or call a suicide crisis helpline. Don't let a bad experience stop you from finding someone who can help.

**Remember that while it may seem as if these suicidal thoughts and feelings will never end, this is never a permanent condition. You WILL feel better again.**

In the meantime, there are ways to help cope with your suicidal thoughts and feelings:

1. Talk to someone every day, preferably face to face. Though you may feel like withdrawing, ask a friend or family member to be with you. Or call a crisis line if you need to talk about your feelings.
2. Avoid solitude.
3. Get outside every day.
4. Exercise as much and as frequently as you can, and get a boost from your endorphins. It relieves stress and promotes emotional well-being.
5. Eat well and don't skip meals.
6. Make time for things you enjoy. Even if little currently brings you pleasure, force yourself to do the things you used to enjoy.
7. Resurrect our personal goals. Remind yourself of what you've always wanted to achieve and set yourself some targets to get there. Baby steps are okay as you get going.
8. Build your support network. Surround yourself with positive influences and people who make you feel good about yourself. The more you're invested in other people and your community, the more you have to lose—which will help you stay positive and on the road to recovery.
9. Develop new activities and interests. Find new hobbies, volunteer activities, or work that gives you a sense of meaning and purpose. When you're doing things you find fulfilling, you'll feel better about yourself and feelings of despair are less likely to return.
10. **Learn to deal with stress in a healthy way.** Keep your stress levels in check by meditating, using sensory strategies to relax, practising simple breathing exercises, and challenging self-defeating thoughts.

*Adapted and developed from materials by Jaelline Jaffe, Ph.D., Lawrence Robinson, and Jeanne Segal, Ph.D.*

#### Additional Resources

*About Suicide – UK National Health Service*

Site offering information for those considering suicide or have attempted suicide in the past.

*Coping with Suicidal Thoughts – Consortium for Organizational Mental Health*

PDF download with information on how to understand your suicidal feelings and how to develop a safety plan.