



Constructing a Healthier Industry

Information Partner



suicide

Suicide and suicidal behaviour are complex and challenging problems which affect many young people and their families during the teen and early adult years. It's very frightening to find out that someone you know might be feeling suicidal. If you're concerned about someone you know, the information below may be helpful to let you know what you can do and where you can go for help.

WHAT ARE SUICIDAL BEHAVIOURS?

Suicidal behaviour refers to a number of thoughts and actions of varying intensity related to selfharm. Suicidal behaviours includes:

- Thoughts of dying
- Making plans to attempt suicide
- Attempting suicide.

Sometimes suicidal behaviour is a 'cry for help', rather than a true desire to end one's life. Other times, suicidal behaviour may be a true indication that a person wishes to die. It's often difficult to work out which is the case, so it's extremely important that all suicidal behaviours are taken seriously and all people feeling this way get the help they need.

WHAT CAUSES SUICIDAL BEHAVIOUR IN YOUNG PEOPLE?

Like those for depression, the causes of suicidal behaviour are many and varied. Some factors which may result in suicidal behaviour include:

- Mental illness, especially depression
- A family history of mental illness
- Child abuse or sexual abuse
- Extremely difficult life events
- Certain aspects of personality (such as extreme negativity or tendencies to worry or blame oneself for things)
- Not feeling connected to friends or family.

WARNING SIGNS

Warning signs are different for everyone and sometimes they're really well hidden. Often, the person will seem really down, they won't have been themselves for quite a while and they may talk about wanting to die. Other warning signs include:

Current or recent suicidal thoughts

The person may say they've thought about suicide, making comments like "No one would care if I was dead" or "I hate my life." This may also be reflected in other ways, such as artwork they do, stories they write and the way they're looking after themselves.

Withdrawal

A person contemplating suicide might withdraw from their family, friends and normal activities such as playing sport or going to classes. A change in their performance at, or attitude towards school, university or work might also be a sign of withdrawal.

Depression

Depression and other mental illnesses can be a trigger for suicidal behaviour. Depression is treatable, and it is important that the person gets the right type of help. The warning signs for depression include thoughts such as "I'm useless" and "No one cares about me". They may also feel guilty or ashamed about things that have happened in their life.

Mood swings

A person considering suicide may have very sudden changes in their moods, seeming very sad one day and very happy the next. Sometimes, when a person who's previously been upset suddenly seems calm and content, it may mean they've made a decision about a suicide plan.

Change in personality, behaviour or appearance

The person may change their eating or sleeping patterns. There also may be sudden changes in their behaviour (for example, they may suddenly become aggressive, angry or agitated), their appearance and their outlook on life.

Alcohol and drug use

The person may start bingeing on alcohol or party drugs.

Impulsiveness or risk tasking

A person contemplating suicide might start to take risks, such as train surfing, mixing drugs or driving at high speeds. They may change their sexual habits, drop out of school or university, quit work or leave home.

Trauma or stressful events

A traumatic event in someone's life can increase their risk of suicidal behaviour. These events can include the divorce of their parents, a relationship break up, the loss of a job or someone they care about, or doing unexpectedly badly at something.



Sometimes suicidal behaviour is a 'cry for help', rather than a true desire to end one's life.

Giving away possessions or settling unfinished business

The person may start throwing away their possessions or giving them to friends and family. They may make a will or other 'final arrangements.'

WHAT TO DO WHEN A PERSON YOU KNOW IS SHOWING SIGNS OF SUICIDAL BEHAVIOUR

- Acknowledge what the person is experiencing; acknowledge their fear, sadness or despair. Use whatever techniques you feel comfortable with to make them feel valued and worthwhile.
- Acknowledge the problem that the person's facing. Recognise their concern rather than passing over the problem or trying to make it seem small and insignificant. Provide them with reassurance without dismissing the problem.
- Suggest alternative solutions and try to help them see the problem in a new light. Try to avoid sounding like you're lecturing or preaching to them.
- Believe the person and take their concerns seriously.
- Be calm and understanding—try not to appear shocked or alarmed by anything the person tells you.
- Show that you're concerned by listening carefully and asking questions to find out more about what the person's thinking and feeling.
- Ask them directly if they're thinking about suicide. This can be really hard to do but it shows them that you care. If they say yes, don't make promises about keeping it secret.
- Suggest that they should get professional help as soon as possible. Help them make an appointment with a doctor, counsellor or psychologist and perhaps go along with them to help them feel more comfortable.
- If they're in immediate danger of harming themselves, someone should stay with them till they're out of danger. This doesn't have to be you, but it should be someone you trust to get the help which is needed.
- If the person refuses help or isn't able to get it for themselves, it's important that you talk to a health or welfare professional for advice on the situation. You should let the parents of the person know what's going on, unless it's an emergency and you have to act straight away.
- If you're caring for a person who's suicidal over long periods of time, make sure you look after yourself as well. Make sure you take time out to do things you enjoy and talk the problem through with an adult you trust. On the next page we've included some numbers for phone lines you can call if you want to talk or if you need advice.

NEED HELP NOW?

If you or someone you know is in need of urgent help, Ybblue recommends that you consult your doctor, the emergency department of your local hospital or a mental health professional (such as a psychologist or psychiatrist).

For immediate help in a crisis situation, ring the police or ambulance service on 000 and clearly tell the operator that someone's life is in danger.

• Phone Helplines

Whether it's you or someone else that needs help, you can also phone Lifeline or Kids Helpline to speak to trained counsellors. Sometimes these lines get a lot of calls all at once, so it's important that if you do not get through on your first try, that you continue trying until you do.

• The OzHelp Foundation

1300 OZHELP (1300 694 357)
www.ozhelp.org.au

• BeyondBlue

For information about depression, anxiety and related drug and alcohol problems visit www.beyondblue.org.au or call the *beyondblue: the national depression initiative* info line on 1300 22 4636

• Lifeline

Phone: 131 114
Website: www.lifeline.org.au
Lifeline is a 24-hour telephone counselling service where you can talk to someone about a wide range of problems.

• Kids Help Line

Phone: 1800 551 800 (freecall)
Website: www.kidshelp.com.au
Kids Help Line is a national 24-hour telephone counselling service for young people aged between 5 and 18 years. Their website also has a service where you can email a counsellor or chat with one online between 3pm and 9pm Monday to Friday and 10am and 4pm Saturday (Queensland time).

• Suicide Help Line (Victoria only)

Phone: 1300 651 251
Suicide Help Line national 24-hour telephone counselling service for those in danger of self-harm. This particular service operates in Victoria only—check the White Pages for emergency services in other areas.

• SANE Helpline

Phone: 1800 688 382
Website: www.sane.org
SANE Helpline is not a counselling service, but they can provide you with information and answer your questions about mental health and related issues. The SANE Helpline operates between 9am and 5pm, Monday to Friday.

SOURCES

- Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing (2004). [<http://www.health.gov.au/nhmrc/publications/pdf/mh12.pdf>]
- Mental Health Foundation of Australia (2003). Embrace the future: Young Australians' Mental Health and Wellbeing



Australian Government
Department of Health and Ageing