

# Conversation Guide: Talking about suicide

## Warning signs and starting the conversation

### How might you spot warning signs?

If you're not sure that someone is feeling suicidal, ask them.

Changes in personality and behaviour could be a sign:

- Becoming anxious, irritable, or having mood swings.
- Being more confrontational.
- Acting recklessly.
- Sleeping too much or too little.
- Avoiding contact.
- Having problems with work or studies.
- Saying negative things about themselves.

### How could you talk to someone?

- Empathise with them and encourage them to talk about their feelings.
- Tell them you care and that they're not alone.

- Show you're listening by repeating their words back to them.
- Ask about their reasons for dying and explore their reasons for living.
- Ask if they've felt like this before. Did their feelings change last time?
- Reassure them that they won't feel this way forever.

### How could you help?

- Encourage them to seek help that they are comfortable with: a doctor, a counsellor, or a charity such as the Samaritans.
- Follow up any commitments that you agree to.

- Make sure someone is with them if they are in immediate danger.
- Get support for yourself.

It is normal to feel uncomfortable. If you don't know what to say, remember that you don't need to find an answer, or even understand why they're feeling this way. Listening will let them know you care.

## What won't help someone?

- Trying to find an easy solution.
  - Changing the subject.
  - Judging, criticising or blaming them.
- Avoid telling them:
- To 'cheer up', 'pull themselves together', 'man up' or 'snap out of it'
  - That they have no reason to feel like that.

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- That they should be grateful for having a good life.
- That they're being silly.

This may make someone feel rejected, alone, misunderstood, guilty, patronised, or criticised. Reassurance, respect and support will help.

## What you can do

### Who would you talk to?

- List the people that you trust like family and friends, and share the name of your GP. Know how to contact the Samaritans, or call 999 if you need immediate help.
- Share the places you feel safe, it may be your bedroom, a friend's house, a library, or know to go to A&E if you need immediate help.



### What could you do to help yourself when you're feeling low?

- Think about all the good things in your life. What are you looking forward to? These can be small wins.
- Try to get through the day rather than focusing on the future, you may feel more able to cope in a few days.
- What are the activities you enjoy which take your mind off what you're thinking.

### What things make you feel worse which you should avoid?

- Knowing and trying to stay away from your triggers can make you feel more in control of your feelings or stress levels. They're different for everyone, but it could be certain music, photos or drugs and alcohol. What are yours?
- Sometimes it is helpful to share them with your family and friends, because they can help you stay away from them.

### Why not try this breathing exercise?

Sit on a chair or on the floor. Keep your back straight and your shoulders back. Close your eyes and focus on your breathing. Think about how your breathing feels.

Slow down your breathing as much as you can. You may find it useful to count as you inhale and exhale. If you start to have upsetting thoughts, bring your focus back to your breathing. Never forget, you matter.

## For more information

### How could you help someone stay connected?

- Discuss whether they like to schedule time to call or see people, or if they prefer to make contact more spontaneously?
- Do they know any local community groups that they could join?
- Have they joined our online community where there is someone to talk to 24/7.

[www.clic-uk.org](http://www.clic-uk.org)

### Can suicide affect anyone?

Yes. Though male suicide rates are high across the UK, suicide also affects women, trans and non-binary people. Bust some myths and find out more information about prevalence in the UK, visit

[mentalhealth-uk.org/suicide/](http://mentalhealth-uk.org/suicide/)

### How could you encourage others in your community to help prevent suicide?

- Who can you pass this card on to next?
- Will you share what you've learned today?
- Encourage people to sign up to the Zero Suicide Alliance's free awareness training



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### How might you support someone experiencing suicidal thoughts?

- Would you listen without judgement?
  - Where can you signpost them to further support?
- Read Rethink Mental Illness' factsheet to feel more confident



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