

How to Manage SUICIDAL THOUGHTS and Find Support









Every year, more than 300,000 people in the United States are treated in the emergency department for injuries that result from self-harm.¹ Suicidal thoughts can impact someone of any age or background. And suicide is often an indicator of an untreated – or undertreated – mental health condition.

You don't have to suffer alone with these thoughts. It's important to reach out for support.

KNOW THE WARNING SIGNS

Sometimes there are warning signs that indicate when things deteriorate for you and you need to seek support. These feelings can change in intensity and duration from day to day, but are all critical warning signs.² You may notice that:

-  Your behavior becomes reckless.
-  You use more alcohol or other substances.
-  You feel out of control.
-  You feel hopeless or worthless.
-  You withdraw from friends and family.
-  You consider giving away important belongings.

These warning signs may or may not seem obvious to you. Yet either way, it's important that you talk to someone when you – or someone close to you – notices changes in your mood or behavior.³

How Do I Start a Conversation About Suicidal Thoughts?

Suicidal thoughts can be difficult to talk about. Yet honest conversations can help prevent these thoughts from progressing into harmful actions. If you are not in crisis, find someone you're comfortable talking to about how you feel. This person might be a family member, friend, partner, or clergy person.

When you explain how and what you feel, it can empower you to challenge thoughts and feelings of self-harm and create a plan for how to manage them. You might say to a trusted friend, "I feel so down, it's hard to get out of bed," or "Sometimes I feel like I don't want to live anymore," or "Things are too hard and I can't keep doing this." Open up to a trusted person and it can lead to conversations that help you find the support you need.

It's critical that you connect with someone **before** it becomes a crisis. If you don't have someone you feel comfortable talking to, reach out to your doctor, a therapist, or someone from your treatment team. They are trained to help you manage these feelings and the risks of suicide. They can work with you on a plan to stay safe.

Even when you cannot easily find a trusted person to talk to, there are places you can turn which are listed on the next page. They always have someone to listen and support you. Never give up hope.

MYTHS ABOUT SUICIDE

Myths about suicide reinforce stigma with incorrect assumptions. Everyone should know that the causes of suicide are complex. It's helpful to remember these myths.

MYTH

You are at less risk for self-harm because you talk about it.³

Talking to someone does help, but sometimes more support is needed. The person you trust to talk to can often recognize this and assist you in finding additional support to help you avoid a crisis.

MYTH

Risk factors for suicide are always clear.

They can vary, build over time, and are influenced by stressors, mental health conditions, and other complex changes to your health.³ Everyone experiences these factors in different ways. This is another reason why finding support is vital.

MYTH

You only have just one opportunity to help yourself.

Even if you experience suicidal thoughts that come and go or aren't always severe, there are many opportunities for prevention and intervention. It's always important to reach out any time that you are struggling.

Today, we also know more about neuroscience and the chemicals in our body that influence mood and thoughts. Just like with other medical conditions, there are options to treat symptoms of mental health conditions. This can improve how you feel and be an empowering source of hope.

STEPS YOU CAN TAKE

It's important to have a strategy to manage suicidal thoughts. This should include a well-defined safety plan. Safety plans outline clear steps to follow when these thoughts emerge.

Think of your safety plan as a map. It provides directions to help you stay safe, feel better, and give you a greater sense of control.

1

List in advance the actions you plan to take and the resources you plan to access when suicidal thoughts occur.

2

Include several people you can call and their contact information. Reach out to someone as soon as you experience suicidal thoughts.

3

Identify crisis support resources that you can turn to.

In times of crisis, you may find that going to the hospital is necessary. This step can ensure your safety and help you regain a feeling of stability. That's why your plan should include a [psychiatric advance directive \(PAD\)](#). A PAD is an important part of person-centered care. It allows you to make your treatment preferences known. That way, if and when a crisis occurs, you have a voice in your care. SMI Adviser offers an app called [My Mental Health Crisis Plan](#) that lets you easily create and share your PAD with trusted supports.

Make sure your treatment team knows about your safety plan. Involve your [support system](#) as you create it.

Find a Voice



You are a unique individual. It's important to pay attention to how you feel and talk to someone you trust. Let others know how you feel and have a plan to stay safe.

Ask for help right away if you experience suicidal thoughts.

Remember that if you are in immediate danger, call 911.

You are the team leader in your care. You don't have to endure suicidal thoughts or suffer alone.

Resources

[NAMI Helpline](#) 1-800-950-NAMI (6264)

[SAMSHA Helpline](#) 1-800-662-HELP (4357)

[National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#) 1-800-273-8255

References

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