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## Suicide

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### Summary

- People with anxiety and depression are more likely to take their own lives than other people.
  - Depression is a major cause of suicide, however not everyone with depression is suicidal. Similarly, not everyone who takes their own life has depression.
  - Thoughts about harming yourself or suicide are just thoughts and do not mean you have to actually harm yourself.
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In Australia, suicide is the leading cause of death for males and females aged between 15 and 44. About 3,000 people in Australia per year take their own lives. That's almost eight people every day. For every suicide, there are tragic ripple effects for friends, families, colleagues and the broader community.

We can all play a role in preventing suicide by looking out for possible **warning signs**, reaching out and **talking about it**.

### Why do people think about suicide?

Sometimes, life can present overwhelming situations that can be difficult to deal with. When faced with these situations some people may consider suicide but not act on these thoughts, while others may believe these actions are their only option to relieve unbearable pain. People contemplating suicide feel hopeless and believe that they are alone in their struggles.

What leads a person to consider suicide is complex and will vary from person to person, however, some of the factors that may increase a person's risk of suicide include:

- previous suicide attempts
- history of substance misuse
- history of mental health conditions – such as depression, anxiety, bipolar and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- relationship problems – such as conflict with parents or romantic partners
- legal or disciplinary problems
- access to harmful means, such as medication or weapons
- recent death of a family member or a close friend
- ongoing exposure to bullying behaviour such as cyberbullying
- losing a friend or family member to suicide
- physical illness or disability.

While these risk factors can increase the likelihood of someone taking their own life, there are also many protective factors that can help – providing support and improving a person's ability to cope with difficult circumstances. These may include, but are not limited to:

- adaptive coping skills and a sense of competence
- effective problem solving skills
- supportive work environment
- positive relationships with friends, family and the broader community
- sense of responsibility
- involvement in social and community activities

- belonging to a support group
- access to support and health care.

### **Suicide warning signs**

Someone who is thinking about suicide will usually give some clues or signs to people around them, though these may be subtle. Everyone is different and there is no definitive way to predict how someone will act, but suicide prevention starts with recognising the warning signs and taking them seriously. These may include:

- a sense of hopelessness or no hope for the future
- isolation or feeling alone – “No one understands me.”
- aggressiveness and irritability – “Leave me alone.”
- possessing lethal means – medication, weapons
- negative view of self – “I am worthless.”
- drastic changes in mood and behaviour
- frequently talking about death – “If I died would you miss me?”
- self-harming behaviours like cutting
- engaging in 'risky' behaviours – “I’ll try anything, I’m not afraid to die.”
- making funeral arrangements
- giving things away (clothes, expensive gifts) – “When I am gone, I want you to have this.”
- substance abuse
- feeling like a burden to others – “You would be better off without me.”
- making suicide threats – “Sometimes I feel like I just want to die.”.

### **Responding to suicide warning signs**

Speak up if you are worried that someone may be thinking about suicide. Talking to someone about their suicidal thoughts can be challenging but if you think someone might be thinking about killing themselves, the best way to find out is to ask.

You will not be putting the idea in someone’s head if you ask if they are thinking about suicide. In fact, giving a suicidal person the opportunity to express their feelings can give relief from isolation and pent-up negative feelings, and may in fact reduce the risk of suicide.

### **How to start a conversation about suicide**

There is no one right way to say you care. Be open, direct and compassionate in your approach. You could start with:

- “You haven’t seemed yourself lately and I’m worried about you.”
- “I have noticed that you have been doing (X/Y/Z), and I’m wondering how you are going?”.

You could ask:

- “What can I do to help you?”
- “I’d like to help you get through this, is there something I can do for you?”.

If the person you are worried about isn’t ready to talk, you could say:

- “I want to help you and I am here for you when you want to talk.”.

Visit the [\*\*Conversations Matter website\*\*](#) for more helpful tips on how to talk about suicide.

### **How to tell if a person may be suicidal**

Ask the following questions to determine if the person is at high risk of suicide:

- Do you intend to take your life?
- Do you have a plan to take your life?

- Do you have access to the means to carry out your plan?
- Do you have a timeframe for taking your life?

If the person answers 'yes' to any one of these questions, they are at high risk of suicide. If this is the case, seek immediate help.

### **Talking to someone about your suicidal feelings**

Having suicidal thoughts can be scary. You may have never had them before, or perhaps the thoughts have been there for a while and you are not sure what to do.

You may feel ashamed to talk about your suicidal thoughts or worry that people will judge you or not take you seriously, but talking to someone you trust and feel comfortable with can help you to get the support you need.

Let someone know how you are feeling:

- Share how you feel with someone you trust and feel comfortable with – such as a family member, teacher, doctor or other health professional.
- Try and treat it like any other conversation. You can describe what is happening, how you feel and what help you need. It's best to be direct so that they understand how you feel.
- Be prepared for their reaction. Often people who learn that someone is suicidal can be quite confused and emotional at first. Just keep talking. Together you can find a way through it.
- Ask them to help you find support – this could be in person, online or over the phone.
- Understand that others do care. It is important to have support from your friends, but if you tell them about your suicidal thoughts, don't expect them to keep it a secret. They will want to help you stay safe, and that usually means calling in extra help.

### **Suicide safety planning**

**BeyondNow is an app** that helps people to create their own suicide safety plan; a plan to keep them safe when they experience suicidal thoughts.

If you are experiencing suicidal thoughts or feelings, or someone close to you is, safety planning can help you get through the tough moments.

Suicide safety planning involves creating a structured plan – ideally with support from your health professional or someone you trust – that you work through when you're experiencing suicidal thoughts, feelings, distress or crisis.

Your safety plan starts with things you can do by yourself, such as thinking about your reasons to live and distracting yourself with enjoyable activities. It then moves on to coping strategies and people you can contact for support – your friends, family and health professionals.

The BeyondNow app puts your safety plan in your pocket so you can access and edit it at any time. You can also email a copy to trusted friends, family or your health professional so they can support you when you're experiencing suicidal thoughts or heading towards a suicidal crisis.

BeyondNow is free to download from the **Apple Store** or **Google Play**. If you don't have a smartphone or would prefer to use your desktop or laptop, **BeyondNow is also available to use online.**

### **Where to get help**

**If the situation is urgent and you're concerned someone is in immediate danger, do not leave the person alone, unless you are concerned for your own safety.**

Call the person's doctor, a mental health crisis service or dial 000 and say that the person's life is at risk. If the person agrees, you could go together to the local hospital emergency department for assessment.

**If you are thinking about ending your life, tell someone. Let them know you are thinking about hurting yourself, and that you are worried. Ask for help.**

**If you are in immediate danger call:**

- Triple zero (000)

- **Lifeline** Tel **13 11 14**
- **SuicideLine** Victoria Tel **1300 651 251**
- **Suicide Call Back Service** Tel **1300 659 467**

If you just need to talk:

- **beyondblue** Tel. **1300 22 4636**
- Your GP – when you book, explain that you need a longer appointment
- **Victorian mental health services in your area**
- **headspace** Tel **1800 650 890**
- **MensLine** Tel **1300 78 99 78**
- **Kids Helpline** Tel **1800 55 1800**
- **WIRE Women's Support Line** Tel **1300 134 130**

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