



Can YOU Talk About Suicide?

Discussing suicidal thoughts and impulses can help to reduce their intensity, and ultimately, saves lives. This brief article encourages you to have conversations about suicide and take practical steps to prevent it. It explains why some people have suicidal thoughts, and helps you to recognise who might be having them. Guidance is given on how you can actively listen to someone talking about their suicidality, and what you might ask. As it is essential that people contemplating suicide get professional help, the how, why and who to contact are also explained. Talking about suicide is a positive way that we can all reduce the stigma surrounding it.

Who can become suicidal?

Whilst suicide is most commonly associated with people who have mental illnesses, anyone can become suicidal. Feelings of suicide can arise from experiencing overwhelming emotion brought about through losses, heartbreak and challenges that seem unmanageable. When solutions to problems seem unachievable, it can feel as though, ending one's life is the only way out. The majority of people who think about taking their own lives, don't really want to die. They just want the pain to stop!

How YOU can recognise when someone is suicidal.

Identifying someone who is considering suicide, isn't as hard as you may think. There are a number of signs that indicate when someone is contemplating suicide.

What YOU can look for:

- **Changes in presentation:** Do they appear to be more withdrawn, stressed or depressed than they normally are? Are they quieter, happier, calmer, angrier or sadder than usual? Have you noticed a change in the way they look or dress?
- **Changes in actions:** Have they become more argumentative, destructive or engaging in criminal behaviour? Are they agitated or having extreme mood swings? Are they isolating themselves? Have their sleep patterns changed? Are there changes in their alcohol, medication or substance use? Are they giving away or selling their possessions? Have they started, or increased, any intentional self-harm? Have they made other attempts to end their life?
- **Changes in speech:** Do they say things like: I'm alone, I'm tired, I'm exhausted, I'm useless, I'm a burden, I can't do this anymore, I'm done? Or something like: I've got no purpose, I need to escape, everyone would be better off without me, I wish I was dead?
- **Past experiences:** Are they troubled by recent or historical heartbreak, losses or bereavement? Have they ever experienced a traumatic event? Have they suffered abuse of any kind (physical, sexual, emotional or psychological)? Has someone else's suicide affected them? Have they made previous suicide attempts?
- **Listen to your intuition:** Have you noticed something that doesn't sit quite right internally? Have you picked up on something that makes you feel worried or concerned? This could be about a friend, family member, work colleague, or neighbour. It could be someone that you know well, only slightly, or barely at all.

What YOU can do if you think someone might be suicidal.

Ask: Talk openly, honestly and directly to the person you're worried about. Tell them that you've noticed signs that lead you to think they may be thinking of suicide. Invite them to talk and let them know that you want to help. Talking allows the individual to express their thoughts, impulses and emotions, and tell their story. It gives them the space to understand what is burdening them and leading them to want to end their life. Listen for reasons why they want to die and, more importantly, their reasons for wanting to live. Help them focus on their reasons for living, whilst not undermining their struggles. Try not to act shocked and NEVER be sworn to secrecy. Avoid judging or belittle their thoughts or feelings and DO NOT assume they are just seeking attention. NEVER test a person's suicidal intentions by daring them to act on their suicidal thoughts and impulses.

Actively listen: Whilst you are listening to the person you are concerned about, make them your priority. Because they may think that no one cares, help them to feel that they are important by actively listening to them. You can show that you are interested in what they have to say by:

- Giving them time to speak and try not to interrupt.
- Maintaining eye contact, and avoid distractions like mobile phones and watches
- Acknowledge what they are saying with nods of the head and verbal acknowledgements
- Summarise what they tell you and repeat words they have used
- Try to ask open questions, which cannot be responded to by "yes" or "no" answers.
- Ask questions related to what they have said and get clarification about what they mean

Asking someone if they feel suicidal will not lead to them acting on those feelings, nor will it make a non-suicidal person become suicidal

What YOU can do if someone is considering suicide.

Because suicidal thoughts can be seen as a representation of pain, sadness, and shame, it is important to take time to observe, talk and connect with an individual who is suicidal. Ask the person if they have made a plan to end their life and what would cause them to act on that plan. Determine how the suicidal person plans to end their life and help them to dispose of any lethal means they are at risk of using. These could be a stock pile of medication or drugs, sharp objects like a knife or gardening tool, or perhaps they plan to use a rope of some kind. Encourage this person to avoid alcohol or drugs as these can lower any inhibition which might be preventing them from acting on their suicidal impulses.

If someone is in imminent risk of killing themselves, ensure that they are not left alone. If you are speaking to this person by phone, keep talking to them until it is clear the individual is safely with someone. Get support from a trained suicide intervention professional or call 111. If someone has acted on their suicidal thoughts, take them straight to A & E or call 999 immediately.

How YOU can help someone considering suicide to get professional support.

Assessing the degree of risk and the imminence of suicide, is best done by a mental healthcare professional. So, no matter the extent of suicidal intention that someone appears to have, it is important they get professional support. You can sit with the person whilst they contact a suicide intervention professional, or offer to do that for them. When making contact on someone else's behalf, be ready to give the trained professionals the suicidal person's name and key points from your conversation e.g. plan, timeline, feelings, life events. You do not have to recount the full conversation.

You can help a suicidal person remember their suicide support appointments and offer to go with them. Agree with the individual whether you will go into their appointments, wait outside, or ensure they have another means of getting home safely. Help this person build up a network of support, both professional and personal. Supporting someone with suicidal thoughts and/or impulses can be demanding, so share the responsibility with others and look after yourself.

Suicide is everyone's responsibility, and everyone has the ability to save lives

Stay hopeful

With continued support and access to a range of therapies, positive and meaningful reasons to live can be found.

Stay vigilant

Although most suicides are preventable when the right help is available, this does not necessarily mean that someone who previously considered suicide will never contemplate suicide again.

Who are the suicide intervention professionals?

It is vital to connect someone with suicidal thoughts or impulses with professional support that provides hope and helps them to find positive reasons for living. If you have concerns, please contact:

Nai's House: 07437 497697 (phone or text) F messenger: @NaishouseBicester

Hopeline: 0800 068 4141

Samaritans (18+): 116 123

Oxford safe haven (18+): 01865 903037 or 07710 092849

Open: Fri/Sat/Sun/Mon 6-10pm self refer by phone on the day from 5pm

Banbury safe haven (18+): 01297 270004 or 07851 246546

Open: Fri/Sat/Sun/Mon 6-10pm self refer by phone on the day from 5pm

Online introduction to basic suicide awareness can be found at START:

<https://shop.livingworks.net/discount/T-42392?redirect=%2Fproducts%2Flivingworks-start>

If you have trained in ASIST or Suicide First Aid in the last three years and would be interested in working with Nai's House on our suicide prevention initiatives, please contact gem@naishouse.co.uk

If you are interested in further suicide prevention and intervention training please contact: hello@naishouse.co.uk (if you have not received a reply within 5 days please check your spam box, thank you)