



Are you worried someone is thinking of suicide?

Advice for families, whānau and friends

If you're worried that someone might be thinking about suicide, **don't be afraid to ask them directly.**

If someone has thoughts or feelings about suicide, it's important to take them seriously.

It can be really hard to tell someone you care about that you are feeling suicidal. If someone tells you they are thinking about suicide, recognise their pain or what they've just said and invite them to keep talking.

Let them know there is help available to them. Encourage them to get help and talk to someone about what they are going through.

Most people who attempt suicide don't want to die – they just want their pain to end or can't see another way out of their situation.

A person who is thinking about suicide might not ask for help, but that doesn't mean that help isn't wanted. They might feel whakamā or ashamed of how they're feeling, like they don't deserve help, or like no-one can help them.

Lots of people feel suicidal at some time in their lives. It can feel impossible to have hope that things will get better.

People who feel suicidal often feel like they are alone and that their family, whānau and friends would be better off without them.

Support from people who care about them, and connection with their own sense of culture, identity and purpose, can help them to find a way through.



**“It’s okay to talk
with me about
anything, and I
mean that.”**

What to look out for

Warning signs for suicide



Most people thinking about taking their own life will try to let someone know, but they often won't say so directly.

If someone shows one or more of these signs, it doesn't necessarily mean they are suicidal, but it's likely they need your support.

You might notice they:

- **access things** they could use to hurt themselves, like a rope or gun
- **read or write** about suicide online, or post photos or videos about suicide
- **become obsessed** with death
- **become isolated** or withdrawn from family, whānau and friends
- **don't seem to be coping** with any problems they may be having
- tell you they **want to die** or kill themselves
- **have changes in mood** - becoming depressed, angry or enraged
- **hurt themselves** - for example, cutting skin or taking an overdose
- **feel worthless**, guilty, whakamā or ashamed
- have **no hope** for the future
- use **drugs or alcohol** to cope with difficult feelings or thoughts
- lose or gain a lot of weight, or have **unusual eating patterns**



- **sleep a lot** more than usual, or stop getting enough sleep
- seem to have **lost interest** in life, or things they used to enjoy
- **give away possessions**, pay back debts or 'tie up loose ends'
- stop taking **their medication**
- **suddenly seem calm** or happy after they have been depressed or suicidal

Some people who are suicidal might not show these signs, and some warning signs may not be obvious.

People who feel suicidal might try to hide what they are going through or pretend they are okay.

If you think that someone might be at risk, pay attention to changes in their behavior, trust your instincts and ask them directly if they are thinking about suicide.

Who is most at risk of suicide?

People from all backgrounds can feel suicidal.
Lots of people go through this.


Someone may be at higher risk if they have:

- **attempted** suicide before
- been **experiencing depression**, an eating disorder or another mental illness
- **an addiction** to alcohol, drugs or gambling
- a serious **physical illness**
- just started or stopped taking **medication** for a mental health problem
- **lost a friend or family member** to suicide
- **been a victim** of violence, bullying or sexual abuse
- **recently broken up** with their partner or lost custody of their children
- **a court case** coming up or a recent **prison sentence**
- been judged, shamed or put under a lot of **pressure**
- **no strong relationships** with family, whānau, friends or community
- **no sense of their own** culture, identity or purpose in life



- **been through a major life change**, like moving to a different country, coming out as gay or transgender, or retiring from work
- **had a major loss or disappointment**, like someone close to them dying, failing exams or being dropped from their sports team, or having their refugee status declined
- **been struggling** to find work, lost their job recently, or had serious money problems
- friends, family or people around them who **don't accept or support who they are**, like their sexuality, gender identity, culture or religion





“I know there’s a
lot going on for
you right now...”

“...I just want to
ask seriously, have
you thought about
suicide?”

How to help when you're worried about someone

In a crisis or emergency

If someone has attempted suicide or you're worried about their immediate safety, do the following:



Call your local mental health crisis assessment team or go with them to the emergency department (ED) at your nearest hospital.



If they are an immediate physical danger to themselves or others, **call 111**.



Stay with them until support arrives.



Remove any obvious means of suicide they might use (e.g. rope, pills, guns, car keys, knives).



Try to **stay calm** and let them know you care.



Keep them talking: listen and ask questions without judging.



Make sure **you are safe**.

If you think someone is at risk

If you are worried that someone is suicidal, ask them. It could save their life.

Asking about suicide in a supportive way will not put the thought in their head.

Ask them directly about their thoughts of suicide and what they are planning. If they have a specific plan, they need help right away.

Ask them if they would like to talk about what's going on for them with you or someone else. They might not want to open up straight away, but letting them know you are there for them is a big help.

Listen and don't judge. Take them seriously and let them know you care.

Help them to find and access the support they need from


people they trust: friends, family, kaumātua, faith, community or cultural leaders, or professionals.

Don't leave them alone - make sure someone stays with them until they get help.


Support them to access professional help, like a doctor or counsellor, as soon as possible. Offer to help them make an appointment, and go with them if you can.

If they don't get the help they need the first time, keep trying.

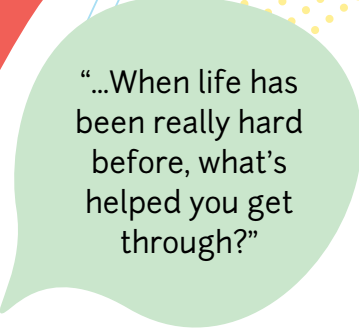
Ask them if they would like your help explaining what they need to a professional.



**“I’m gutted you’re
feeling this bad...”**



“...I really want
you to stay
with us...”



“...When life has
been really hard
before, what’s
helped you get
through?”



How to be supportive

Be gentle and compassionate with them.

Don't judge them - even if you can't understand why they are feeling this way, accept that they are.

Try to stay calm, positive and hopeful that things can get better.

If they are comforted by prayer or karakia, invite them to pray with you.

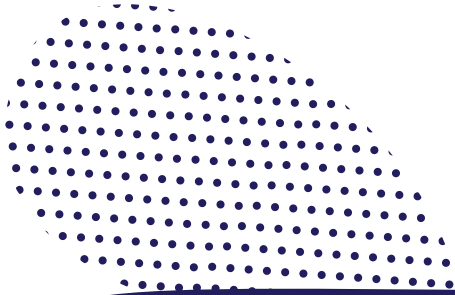
You don't need to have all the answers, or to offer advice. The best thing you can do is be there and listen.

Let them talk about their thoughts of suicide – avoiding the topic does not help. Ask them if they've felt this way before, and what they did to cope or get through it. They might already know what could help them.

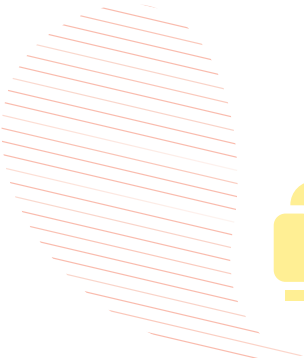
Do not agree to keep secrets about their suicidal thoughts or plans. It's okay to tell someone else so that you can keep them safe.

Don't pressure them to talk to you. They might not want to talk, or they might feel more comfortable talking to someone who is not as close to them.

Don't try to handle the situation by yourself. Seek support from professionals, and from other people they trust including family, whānau or friends.



**“I want to know what’s
going on for you...”**



**“...what you’re
thinking about,
or how you’re
feeling”**

How to support recovery

If you're supporting someone who is recovering after they have made a suicide attempt, or have felt suicidal, be prepared to be there, offer support and stay involved.

Recovery can take time.




- You might need to be prepared to have **difficult conversations about what's going on** in their life and how they are feeling.
- **Keep listening** to them and don't avoid talking about suicide or the hard things in their life.
- **Don't give up on them** and try not to lose contact with them, even if it seems like they are ignoring you.
- Help them feel there is hope of things getting better – **identify positive things in their life.**
- If they don't want to talk with you, **ask other people you both trust to support them** – friends, family or whānau members, youth workers or others.
- Help them to access professional help, like a doctor or counsellor. **You could offer to go with them or help them to make appointments.**




- Let them know about free counselling services like Lifeline and Youthline and **give them the contact details.**
- **Encourage and support them** to do the things they enjoy, keep physically active and connect with others.
- **Help them identify any ways they can change their lifestyle to restore balance.**
This might mean cutting back on alcohol or drugs, doing some exercise, making time for themselves, or getting enough sleep.



- **Accept them for who they are** and let them know you care.
- **When they're ready,** support them to make plans for their future, solve problems and set goals.



“Is there
someone you
trust that we
could talk to?”



“Does anyone
else know
about this?”

Look after yourself

It is very important to take care of yourself when you are caring for others.

The person you're supporting could recover quite soon, but they may feel the way they do for weeks, months or even years. Looking after yourself is essential to be able to walk alongside them.

Make sure you're getting enough sleep, eating properly and exercising.

Be kind to yourself, and take time out when you need to.

Being in this situation can be very difficult, and you can't do everything.

It's normal to feel scared, powerless or unsure of how to help. Find someone you can talk to about this - a friend or family member you trust, or a counsellor.


It's not helpful to blame yourself if someone close to you attempts suicide.

How to build a support network

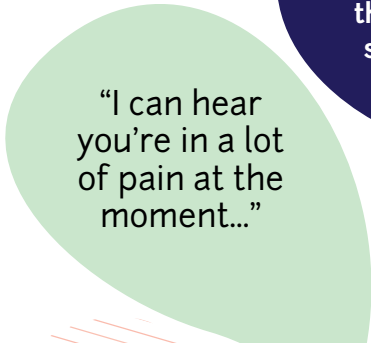
It's important to involve others to help you and the person you're supporting – **don't try to do everything yourself.**

To build a support network:

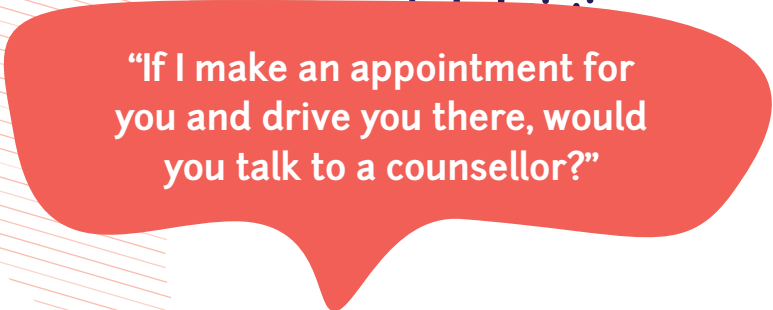
- Ask the person you're supporting to **tell you what they need**, what works for them and who should be involved.
- Your support network might include cultural elders, faith leaders or community groups they're part of, as well as friends, family and whānau. It might include **people who have been through something similar** to the person you're supporting, and can share how they got through it.
- Bring the group together in a **safe space.**
- Talk **openly and honestly** about the situation.
- Talk to them about what they will do if they feel suicidal again, **how they plan to keep safe**, and how others can help with this.
- **Develop a plan together** to support the person - identify how different people can help. Get professional help if you need it. Talk to your local doctor, medical centre, community mental health team or counselling service.



"I don't really know what to do, but I do know that we need some help."



"I can hear you're in a lot of pain at the moment..."



"If I make an appointment for you and drive you there, would you talk to a counsellor?"



More information and support

For more information and support, talk to your local doctor, medical centre, hauora, community mental health team, school counsellor or counselling service.

If you don't get the help you need the first time, keep trying.

Below is a list of some of the services available which offer support, information and help.



For counselling and support

- **Need to talk?**
1737
- free call or text to talk with a trained counsellor, any time
- **Lifeline**
0800 543 354
- for counselling and support
- **Depression Helpline**
0800 111 757
or free text 4202
- to talk to a trained counsellor about how you are feeling or to ask any questions
- **Healthline**
0800 611 116
- for advice from trained registered nurses
- **Samaritans**
0800 726 666
- for confidential support to anyone who is lonely or in emotional distress
- **www.depression.org.nz**
- includes The Journal free online self-help tool
- **0508 Tautoko Crisis Helpline**
0508 828 865
- for support if you're in distress, or worried that someone may be at risk of suicide or for those who are grieving a loss.



All services are free, and are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week unless otherwise stated.



For children and young people

- **Youthline**
0800 376 633, free text 234
or email talk@youthline.co.nz
- for young people, and their parents, whānau and friends
- **What's Up**
0800 942 8787
(0800 WHATSUP)
- for 5-18 year olds (1pm to 11pm)
- **Kidslines**
0800 543 754
(0800 KIDSLINE)
- For young people up to 18 years of age
- **www.thelowdown.co.nz**
visit the website or
free text 5626
- support for young people experiencing depression or anxiety
- **www.auntydee.co.nz**
- a free online tool for anyone who needs some help working through problems.
- **www.sparx.org.nz**
- an online self-help tool that teaches young people the key skills needed to help combat depression and anxiety.



For help with specific issues

- **OUTLine NZ**
0800 688 5463
(0800 OUTLINE)
- for sexuality or gender identity issues (6pm-9pm).
- **Alcohol Drug Helpline**
0800 787 797
free text 8681 or
online chat at
alcoholdrughelp.org.nz
- for people dealing with alcohol or other drug problems
- **Women's Refuge Crisis Line**
0800 733 843
(0800 REFUGE)
- for women living with violence, or in fear, in their relationship or family
- **Shakti Crisis Line**
0800 742 584
(0800 SHAKTI)
- for migrant or refugee women living with family violence
- **Rape Crisis**
0800 883 300
- for support after rape or sexual assault
- **PlunketLine**
0800 933 922
- support for new parents, including mothers experiencing post-natal depression
- **Rural Support**
0800 787 254
- for people in rural communities dealing with financial or personal challenges



For families, whānau, friends and supporters

- **Skylight**
0800 299 100
- for support through trauma, loss and grief (9am-5pm weekdays)
- **Supporting Families In Mental Illness**
0800 732 825
(Northern Region)
0800 555 434
(Central North Island)
0800 876 682
(South Island)
- for families and whānau supporting a loved one who has a mental illness
- **Le Va**
www.leva.co.nz
www.facebook.com/LeVaPasifika
- information and support for Pasifika families through the FLO suicide prevention programme
- **Mental Health Foundation**
www.mentalhealth.org.nz
- for more information about supporting someone in distress, looking after your mental health and working towards recovery.



**He taonga
rongonui te aroha
ki te tangata**

**Compassion for
others is a precious
treasure**



Updated: December 2019
HE Code: HE2502

ISBN: 978-1-877318-89-4 (PDF)
ISBN: 978-1-877318-90-0 (Hardcopy)