

A guide to help with noticing and managing suicidal thoughts



Suicidal thoughts are a natural response to feelings of hopelessness and isolation which may be more likely when we are feeling depressed or low in mood. They may surface in times of overwhelming difficulties and problems, and when it may seem like there are not many options.

It can be helpful for us to recognise suicidal thoughts, impulses/urges as signs or symptoms that there are difficulties in your life right now that may need addressing. If we can spot them as this, then we are more likely to be able to stand back from them a little and start to think about ways of managing them that can break us out of our negative patterns.

It is understandable that by their very nature they are distressing to us and can be overwhelming. They don't have to dictate your life however, and we have provided a leaflet that we think will add to your existing tool bag of how to cope when things start to feel troublesome.

The first thing to do might be to ask yourself if you have the 3 things below covered:

Are you talking to people (friends, family, health professionals, and support groups) about the way that you are feeling? Sometimes we fear we will burden people or that others won't understand, but there are people who will be willing to listen and help. To know that you are not facing this alone can be hugely helpful. There will be a list of helpful contacts at the end of this leaflet.

If we can remove the potential dangers in our house, then we allow ourselves to feel safer when we are most vulnerable. We can think of our home as a 'safe place'. Perhaps you need to remove things like razors, pills, sharp objects, alcohol and so on? If this is too difficult is there a safe place within your friendship/family network where you can turn?

A safety plan is a good way of tackling suicidal thoughts because if it is well written then it will include all the things that are meaningful to you and add value and perspective to your life. It is intended to be written when you are feeling more relaxed and comfortable so that you can access the kinds of positive thoughts and pleasurable/contented feelings that are likely to be absent in times of despair. We will show you an example of a safety plan over the page...

Safety plan

The first thing to highlight is that you need to place this in a memorable and accessible location should you need it in a hurry.

Step 1

Make a list of the kinds of activities that you can do to comfort and calm you. Are there tasks that can really absorb your attention? Are there things that require minimal effort to organise and implement? Are there any great books, feel good movies, friends to unite with, physical exercises, songs that are uplifting and so on?

Step 2

Describe your reasons for living. The memories and experiences that make it all worth it. The things that you cherish most.

Step 3

Consider who are the friends and family members you can rely on to turn to? Who can you imagine encouraging you to speak up, even when you worry about the impact it will have on them.

Step 4

What's the name and number of the health professionals involved in your care (GP, health visitor, therapist, CPN, support worker and so on)

Step 5

Which helpline numbers can I call if my needs still aren't met? Who have I found helpful before? Who is it worth trying this time?

Step 6

Where is the safest place for me to be right now? Am I better with company right now? Will I be able to reach the destination easily enough?

If you have hurt yourself and you are not able to take yourself to A&E you can call 999.

Warning signs

There are lots of things that we can do to help ourselves, but this is easier if we can learn to spot the signs that we are beginning to struggle and act as soon as we can.

Warning signs may be different for everyone but some of the things that seem to be common are:

- _____
- Becoming more isolated
- Using alcohol or drugs to cope with emotions
- Noticing more negative thinking patterns than is usual
- No longer finding activities pleasurable that once were
- Changing our eating habits
- Change in our sleep patterns
- Avoiding certain tasks that in the past would not have caused us trouble

Are you able to add any of your own above?

Helpful strategies

Once again there are several strategies and you may have some of your own that you have developed along the way. If you could do with some more tools have a look at the following or start discovering your own ways.

- Exercising (if you can 3 times per week) is shown to be as effective as medication in some studies
 - Talking to others
 - Writing about your concerns
 - Problems solving any current difficulties – we will give you an example of how to do this next.
 - Finding a balanced routine of time for pleasurable, routine and necessary tasks
 - Seeking help from your GP
 - Discussing your fears with your therapist
 - Find activities that you ‘get lost’ in – what activities seem to pass the time by?
 - Find out what self-harming groups are in your area and join
- Relaxation and meditation can help us stand back from the ‘tornado of thoughts’
 - Keep a diary of the times you feel this way – are there any patterns to discuss with your therapist?
 - Remember that suicidal thoughts will pass – do you want to write this down to remind yourself?
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Problem solving

01

The trick to problem solving is clearly working out what is bothering you – this is easier said than done!

An example of this is that instead of saying: 'I have no money to afford to live'. Try and see if you can be even more specific; an example would be: 'I cannot afford my electricity bill this month, which is £80'

02

Now you have to record all the possible options to tackle this problem – be as creative as you can be and try not to dismiss ideas even if they seem daft (they might lead to other ideas)

03

List the pros and cons of each option (write all of this down so you don't have to store it all in your memory)

04

Review your options and choose one.

05

Plan how you will implement the plan.

06

Try out the plan.

07

Review the plan. If it is successful, then great! Think about what you learnt about yourself and the situation. If it didn't work (success is not guaranteed) then you have your list of options already worked out that you can go back to.

There is no reason why you can't ask another person to support you in this task if you are struggling.

Acting as-if

There is a helpful strategy in Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) called ‘acting as-if’ which is about reversing the behaviours that we feel most strongly to do for ones that we don’t particularly feel drawn to.

This is because we want to try and break the vicious circle. It is natural for us to want to find a way to ease emotional pain – alcohol and drugs are a good example of this as they can make us feel better relatively quickly. The problem is that they are very short-lived. In fact, they probably cause further problems for us going forward if we are not careful. So ‘acting as-if I were happy and positive about my future’ when feeling suicidal may be a good antidote. For example, this may be calling your friend up rather than being alone. It might be worth trying to see how this feels – it may feel rather unnatural to begin before you really get used to this strategy.



Useful contacts

Below are some useful contact details for some national organisations that may be able to help you. It may be that there are some local resources in your area too that would be worth investigating. There are also some useful websites and recommended self- help books should you wish to learn more about your thoughts and feelings. Please note that this leaflet and the resources suggested below are not intended to replace professional care, and you should always see your Doctor if you are experiencing suicidal thoughts.

Your therapist will provide you with advice about numbers to call in a crisis – the crisis number you can call can also be found on our homepage.

National Agencies:

Alcoholics Anonymous

0845 769 7555
alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk

Carers support

0808 808 7777
carersuk.org
Provide advice, information and support to all unpaid carers who are regularly looking after a disabled, ill or frail relative, friend or neighbour.

Citizens Advice Bureau

01392 425 517
citizensadvice.org.uk
Advice about practical problems including benefits, debt, legal issues, support services, care in the community, the mental health act etc.

Cruse Bereavement Care

cruse.org.uk
National service offering support to all bereaved individuals of any age.

Relate

0300 100 1234
relate.org.uk
Relationship counselling and psychosexual therapy.

Samaritans

116 123
samaritans.org
jo@samaritans.org
Text support: 07725 909090
Listening and befriending service to all in need.

Medical Advice

NHS 111 In an emergency, ring my GP, 999 or go to the Accident and Emergency Department

Rape Crisis England and Wales

0808 802 9999
rapecrisis.org.uk
National organisation that will link you up to local support.

Useful Websites

cci.health.wa.gov.au

Excellent free self-help workbooks that you can print off and work through at your own pace (Including Depression, Social Anxiety, Bipolar Disorder, Panic, Worry, Self-Esteem, Disordered Eating)

[livinglifetothefull \(littf.com\)](http://livinglifetothefull.org)

Great website offering a free online life skills course working on skills such as problem solving, assertiveness, healthy living, relaxation etc.

moodgym.anu.edu.au

Free online self-help course looking at mood improvement.