

How to Support Someone thinking of Suicide

Helping someone in your life you think may be having thoughts of suicide can be very meaningful and hard at the same time. If you have concerns about someone you care about or they come to you for support because they are struggling with thoughts of suicide, here are some things you can say and do to take care of them and yourself at the same time.

1 What is telling you to worry?

People who are struggling with thoughts of suicide often find it difficult to ask for help directly. Instead they will put out more subtle signs that they are struggling. What have you noticed, or heard them say or do that is making you feel like suicide is on their mind. Are there major changes in their behaviour, feelings, appearance, or self talk that are making you worry? Trust your gut. If something feels wrong, talk to them about it

2 Ask directly about suicide

When asking about suicide we want to be direct because I want a direct answer. It can be helpful to use the word “suicide” because it makes the question clearer and it gives the message that we are open to talking it and listening without judgement. Suicide is not a bad word.

It can also be helpful to let the person know what we noticed that made us concerned when asking if they are thinking about suicide.

- “I’ve noticed that you’ve been really down lately and not like yourself. I’m wondering are you considering suicide?”
- “You said that the world feels dark. Are you thinking about killing yourself?”

3 Listen without judgement

Suicide can feel like an option for someone when they feeling overwhelmed by very intense negative emotions and experiences. It’s important to take them seriously and take time to listen to them. Remind the person that you care about them, validate their feelings, without judgement. The opportunity to talk openly about reasons for wanting to suicide can really help and give someone great relief. You can ask simple questions to find out how imminent the risk of suicide is.

- “Have you thought about a plan for suicide?”
- “Have you acted on your suicide thoughts in the past?”

4 Keep them and yourself safe

While you are talking you want to find out if this person is open to staying safe, you can then create a plan together to keep them safe. For example, you might suggest staying with them or having someone else stay with them for support. If they have a plan for suicide you could help keep them safe from their method of suicide or support them in reaching out to a resource for help such as a crisis line.

- “How would you feel about working together on a plan to keep you safe tonight?”
- “Who do you feel like you could call if feelings of suicide come up really strongly again?”
- “You said you thought about using pills to suicide, can we remove those pills for now or come up with a way for you to take them safely”

if the person asks you to keep their story a secret you want to let them know that you understand this information is sensitive but we cannot promise secrecy. You can not support this person alone and it is important to get other people and resources involved to keep this person safe.

It is important to take care of your own needs so that you can best support someone else!