

# Suicide Prevention: Overcoming Suicidal Thoughts and Feelings

Stressful events, demanding life situations, physical and emotional problems, and other factors can build to a crisis of suicidal thoughts and behaviors which may lead directly to self-harm. There are steps you can take to manage challenges, strengthen your coping skills and improve your overall psychological health, allowing you to get past suicidal thoughts and feelings.



**Manage Your Risks And Vulnerabilities:** Suicide can be an impulsive act. Secure dangerous items to prevent a fleeting suicidal impulse from turning tragic. Remove firearms, ammunition, medications and household poisons, or ask a family member to keep them in a safe place for now.



**Build Up Your Inner Sources of Strength:** There are certain personal qualities and resources that can help protect you from suicidal thoughts, feelings and actions. These “protective factors” help you:

- Increase resilience
- Improve your coping skills
- Motivate yourself towards growth, stability and health
- Decrease your likelihood of suicidal behavior

| Protective Factor            | What You Can Do to Strengthen Your Protection   |
|------------------------------|---|
| Strong Social Support System | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Work to build and maintain strong bonds to family/unit members and the community.</li> <li>▪ Keep a list of people who can offer support or distraction in times of crisis.</li> <li>▪ Reach out! Some people with depression or suicidal thoughts isolate themselves from others. Make the effort to reconnect; it could save your life.</li> <li>▪ Identify your sources of strength.</li> </ul> |
| Positive Personal Traits     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Keep a positive attitude toward seeking help when needed.</li> <li>▪ Learn to improve impulse control, problem-solving, coping and conflict resolution.</li> <li>▪ Use leisure time constructively. Make time for the activities that you enjoy.</li> </ul>  |
| Access to Health Care        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Make an effort to participate in therapy or treatment.</li> <li>▪ Maintain your general health and wellness.</li> </ul>  |



**Recognize Your Warning Signs:** Warning signs signal an increase in the chance that a person may engage in suicidal behavior in the near future. The most dangerous warning signs are the presence of suicidal thoughts and actions. These are signs that you need help immediately! Strive for a zero tolerance of suicidal thinking.

Other warning signs that might indicate a cause for concern include:

- Increase in substance use (alcohol, drugs, cigarettes)
- Staying away from family and friends
- Feeling hopeless, like there is nothing you can do to improve your situation
- Feeling anxious or irritable
- Feeling no sense of purpose, no reason for living
- Sudden changes in mood, no interest in things you usually like to do
- Anger, rage, seeking revenge
- Trouble sleeping or sleeping too much
- Reckless or risky behavior
- Guilt or shame
- Feeling trapped or stuck in a bad situation, with no way out



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**Use Effective Coping Strategies:** Replace weak coping skills with more effective ones to have direct impact on the quality of your relationships with significant others. You can learn and strengthen these adaptive skills on your own or with professional help. Through better coping strategies, you can better meet life challenges, improve your life quality and decrease your suicide risk. Coping strategies include:

- Anger management
- Conflict resolution
- Stress and anxiety management
- Financial planning
- Career guidance
- Assertiveness
- Relationship building
- Relaxation
- Self-care
- Communication
- Mindfulness (e.g., being present or living in the moment)



**Engage in Treatment:** Certain types of behavioral therapies and medications can help reduce the risk of suicide by addressing the psychological conditions that underlie the risk. Different types of treatments are effective for different types of people. Your therapist will know what might help you the most.

| Effective Treatments for Those at Risk for Suicide |  |
|--|--|
| Cognitive-behavioral Therapy (CBT)                 | CBT helps you change some of your core beliefs and automatic thoughts about yourself, the world and the future. Your current core beliefs may feed negative emotions and behaviors. CBT can also include relaxation techniques and skills training.      |
| Problem-solving Therapy (PST)                      | PST is a type of CBT that teaches you to problem-solve as a coping skill. This skill can increase confidence and a sense of self-control.  |
| Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT)               | DBT teaches new coping skills and increased self-awareness to help you better handle emotional distress.   |
| Interpersonal Therapy (IPT)                        | IPT focuses on impaired social functioning and addresses social difficulties that may lead to psychological problems. This treatment provides new healthy social experiences to improve your sense of social support and your relationships with others. |
| Medications  | Sometimes medications are used in addition to psychotherapy to help manage mood, anxiety and other symptoms.   |



**Keep Crisis Numbers Handy and Plan to Use Them When Needed:** Help is always available to you! Keep this information where you can access it easily and quickly.

- In an emergency, call 911!
- Service Members and Veterans in crisis should seek help immediately by contacting the Military/Veterans Crisis Line. Dial 1-800-273-8255 (press 1 for military) or text 838255 for 24/7 crisis support. The crisis line also provides a chat service at <http://militarycrisisline.net>.
- Know your provider's or clinic's emergency contingency plans and phone numbers.



**Believe in a Better Tomorrow:** When you are feeling hopeless, it can be hard to picture how things could possibly get better. But people who live through a crisis of suicidal thoughts and feelings do come to realize all the things that are worth living for. Make a list of all the reasons why you should not end your life, and think about how ending your life might affect your loved ones. You have weathered hard times in the past, and you can get through the tough time you are experiencing now. You can meet life challenges with effort, active determination and reliance on others when needed. You can build internal strength, take control of how you respond to stressful life events, and reduce stress. These coping strategies can help you manage this uncertain time and get you back on a path to healthy living.



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