

Factsheet



improving people's lives

It's OK to talk about suicide

How to support someone who may be feeling suicidal

We are a group of people with personal or working experience of those who have either had suicidal thoughts or feelings or have lost someone to suicide. We want to share our knowledge and experience, so you are not alone when you are worried about someone who you think may be feeling suicidal. Suicidal thoughts are common but not permanent and can go away. Anyone can have suicidal thoughts, at any time in their life, whatever their background or situation. Suicide has many causes that are unique to each person and we must always take them seriously.

To request a hard copy of this resource please email publichealth-mailbox@devon.gov.uk. This information has been developed by Devon County Council (N Glassbrook) in partnership with Exeter University (P Xanthopoulou), Devon Partnership NHS Trust (G Adams and D Frances), Parental Minds (S Glover) and people with lived experience.



www.devon.gov.uk/care-and-health



Myth busting

There are many myths around suicide that can influence the way we think and make it harder to recognise the signs. They can also make those at risk feel misunderstood, inadequate or alone.

Myth: A suicidal person won't ask for help and if someone is determined to end their own life there is nothing we can do.

Fact: Not everyone who thinks about suicide will tell someone but there may be warning signs through what they say or do. However, they may not always be easy to notice.

Myth: People who talk about suicide don't do it. People who make repetitive remarks about feeling suicidal are not genuine.

Fact: The fact that someone tells you does not mean they are less at risk of taking their own life.

Myth: Asking about suicide may give someone the idea to do it.

Fact: Research shows that asking direct questions about suicide helps to protect someone's life and does not put the idea into someone's head.

Myth: It's a selfish act and the easy way out.

Fact: People who are suicidal often think about and consider other people and worry about their loved ones. They may truly feel everyone will be better off without them.

Myth: It's attention seeking.

Fact: They are drawing attention to the fact they are in crisis and need help. It is important you always take this seriously by reaching out and asking.

What you can do



It is completely understandable that when the person you care for is feeling suicidal, you will do everything in your power to keep them safe.

Reach out and start the conversation – “you don’t seem like yourself”, “How are you?” Ask twice as you may get a more honest response. Don’t worry about saying the wrong thing. People who have felt suicidal will often say what a huge relief it was to be able to talk about what they were experiencing.

Ask questions to understand more and reassure them that they matter and you don’t need to rush off. Tell them you have time to listen.

Ask about suicide “Are you having thoughts about suicide?” “Are you thinking about ending your life?” Be prepared that the answer may be yes. Evidence shows asking someone if they’re suicidal can protect them

Giving your full attention and listening is extremely powerful and helpful. You don’t have to have all the answers, or know how they feel.

Empathise with them and avoid blame. Try not to judge or give advice.

Validation – acknowledging and accepting another person’s emotions, thoughts and experiences. The most important thing in moments of crisis is to have someone alongside them.

Reassure them that it will not always be like this, and that intensity of feelings can reduce in time. Many suicide attempts are impulsive. Delaying allows time for those intense feelings to subside.

Get help – encourage them to seek help that they are comfortable with. For example, help from a doctor or counsellor, or support through a crisis charity such as the Samaritans.

You can only do the best you can with the information you have at the time.

You can try and hold hope with them.

Looking after yourself and preventing burnout

If you know someone who talks about suicide or has attempted it, you might feel a mix of emotions such as feeling upset, frustrated, confused, guilty, angry or scared. These are all normal responses but you must remember to take care of yourself. Here are some things you



can do that might help.

Self-kindness

- Understand that you are not alone in the difficulties you may be experiencing.
- Notice when you are stressed, struggling or overwhelmed and know this is understandable.
- Try to treat yourself with kindness and compassion.

Self-care

- Talk to someone.
- Look after yourself physically.
- Prioritise your own needs at least some of the time and where possible take downtime.
- You can request a Carer's Assessment which may provide some support.
- Seek your own support and help from friends, family, your GP and online support groups.

Support for you after a crisis

Samaritans

Call [116 123](tel:116123)
samaritans.org

Papyrus

Call [0800 068 4141](tel:08000684141) or text 07860039967
papyrus-uk.org

Devon Carers

Call [03456 434 435](tel:03456434435)
devoncarers.org.uk/about

Torbay Carers Service

Call [0300 456 8000](tel:03004568000)
torbayandsouthdevon.nhs.uk/services/carers-service



Pooky Smith's safety plans

devon.cc/selfharmsafetyplan

What to do in an emergency

If someone has attempted suicide, call [999](tel:999) and stay with them until the ambulance arrives. If you're worried that someone is at immediate risk of ending their life or in crisis, you should do the following if you feel able:

- Remove anything visible that the person could use to harm themselves.
- Stay with them if it is safe to do so.
- Call the Access and First Response Service anytime on [0808 196 8708](tel:08081968708). They can provide you with advice, and practical support to the person in crisis. Go to www.dpt.nhs.uk/our-services/first-response-service.
- Attend a drop-in service at a crisis café. Call [0800 4700 317](tel:08004700317).
- Take them to A and E yourself.
- Call [999](tel:999) if there is aggression towards you or others, property, or the person could injure themselves. If you do not feel able to help them stay safe, the police may be able to support you.

Confidential helplines and support

If at first you don't find the help you need, persist. Try all avenues and don't give up.

Samaritans

[116 123](tel:116123) (24 hours, free to call)

PAPYRUS (Prevention of Young Suicide)

[0800 068 41 41](tel:08000684141) (Monday to Friday 10am–10pm, weekends 2pm–10pm, bank holidays 2pm–5pm)

CALM (Campaign Against Living Miserably)

[0800 58 58 58](tel:0800585858) (seven days a week, 5pm–midnight)

SANE

[0300 304 7000](tel:03003047000) (seven days a week, 4.30pm–10.30pm)

MIND

[0300 123 3393](tel:03001233393) (Monday to Friday 9am–6pm)

Devon Partnership Trust - I need help now

[111](tel:111) - 24/7 urgent mental health helpline.



www.devon.gov.uk/care-and-health



[The Moorings @ Devon](#)

If you have been affected by someone's suicide, [Help is at Hand](#) provides useful, practical information about dealing with your feelings and getting support. [First Hand](#) is a resource booklet for anyone affected by the suicide of someone they didn't know (for example, bystander, first responders).

