SUICIDAL IDEATION

If you feel suicidal right now, call 999 – this is an emergency.

What are suicidal thoughts?

Some people think that having suicidal thoughts only 'counts' if you have specific plans on how to end your own life. However, any suicidal thoughts including feeling that people would be better off if you weren't alive, or considering ending your life, are of concern. Men are three times more likely to end their lives by suicide than women, yet women are more likely to share their suicidal thoughts with others. One in five people will feel suicidal at some point in their lives.

What does it feel like to be suicidal?

Many people share that they just want their mental pain to stop, and that they cannot think of another way to make that happen apart from taking their own lives. Emotions like hopelessness, desperation, powerlessness and self-hatred are common, and people can feel completely overwhelmed by negative thoughts. Some people may feel a degree of shame that they are unable to shake off their extreme despair or hopelessness, and some feel dissociated (detached) from loved ones. Some think of suicide as a way to relieve a trapped feeling, where they don't know of a way out of their lives as they are.

How can you spot someone who is suicidal?

Sometimes you can't. An individual may seem to be OK on the surface, but more often there are signs such as sleeplessness, poor self-care, increased alcohol/substance abuse, reckless behaviour or poor appetite. Those with suicidal ideation may withdraw from family or friends, making it harder for people to support. If you are worried about someone, it is important to ask them directly if they are having thoughts of suicide. Contrary to popular belief, talking about suicide does not make people more likely to take their own lives. Men in particular can find it very difficult to share their dark thoughts, but feel relieved when someone else starts the conversation about suicide for them.

What causes suicidal thoughts?

These thoughts are often as a result of early or recent trauma, mental illness, or chronic physical pain. Previous self-harm, including alcohol or drug dependency, all increase the likelihood of suicidal thoughts, as does a family history of suicide. Living alone, losing a loved one or being unemployed are other risk factors for suicide.

Tips to cope with suicidal thoughts

If you feel suicidal right now, call 999 – this is an emergency.

For long term support, always start with your GP, who can recommend a referral for CBT or counselling. The GP may recommend antidepressants which balance neurotransmitters. You can self refer to Talking Therapies through the NHS too (link below). Eating well and exercising really helps to lift mood, so asking a loved one to encourage this is useful. Making plans to go out for a coffee, or see a film are a good idea, to help see positives in the future.

Some medications can contribute to suicidal thoughts – check the leaflet that comes with your medication to see if mood changes can occur. If you are concerned that your medication could be contributing to your suicidal ideation, speak as soon as possible to your GP, dial 111 or speak to a pharmacist.

There are other things you can do 'in the moment' when suicidal feelings are overwhelming. Things will vary from one person to another, but these are some ideas:

- Mindful activities – these can include walking, being outside watching nature, gardening, meditation, swimming or watching a favourite programme/video.
- Writing down your thoughts
- Practise grounding techniques – holding an ice cube, eating an ice pole, sitting in front of a fan, ripping up pieces of paper, take a shower, stroke a pet.
- Removing yourself from any situation or object which can harm you
- Distraction techniques – spending time with loved ones, doing hobbies, playing positive or calming music
- Exercise
- Remind yourself that you deserve to get support. Be kind to yourself like you would to a good friend. Write down something that you are looking forward to.
- There are some excellent helplines (see links below), which can be accessed through a phone line, or by messaging.

It can be useful to support someone by making a Safety Plan with them. Things to include would be:

- Your warning signs
- Strategies which support you
- People you can contact (including helplines)
- How other people can support you
- How you can make yourself physically safe

- Make a 'Happy Box' of things like positive photos, quotes, poems, notes, nice perfume, or a soft blanket/toy.

How long will I feel suicidal?

For most people their suicidal feelings can ebb and flow or vary in intensity. Some find that their suicidal feelings are triggered by certain things. Accessing help will support in allowing these feelings to pass, allowing you to build resilience and hope.

How to tell others you are feeling suicidal

You may worry that you will upset others, or that you will be judged if you tell someone about your feelings. Some people find it easier to write down their feelings for someone to read, rather than having to speak out loud. You may want to print out some information to initiate the conversation, e.g. How to support someone who is feeling suicidal | Mind. If you don't feel you can reach out to friends and family, there are helplines to contact, with staff who are trained to support you through your most difficult thoughts.

Coping after a suicide attempt

Some people feel incredibly ashamed or guilty that they have upset loved ones after they have tried to take their own lives. They may feel stupid, or embarrassed. Some people feel disappointed that they didn't 'succeed' in ending their lives, and some just feel numb. Regret that the attempt was made, or relief that the attempt was unsuccessful are also common feelings after a suicide attempt.

If a Safety Plan has not already been completed, it is a good idea to complete one after a suicide attempt to try to avoid it happening again.

Helplines and useful contacts:

Mind's services

- Mind's helplines provide information and support by phone and email.
- Local Minds offer face-to-face services across England and Wales. These services include talking therapies, peer support and advocacy.
- Side by Side is our supportive online community for anyone experiencing a mental health problem.

Other organisations

Campaign Against Living Miserably (CALM)

0800 58 58 58
thecalmzone.net
Provides a helpline, online and WhatsApp chat, as well as information and support, for anyone affected by suicide or suicidal thoughts.

Carers UK

0808 808 7777
advice@carersuk.org
carersuk.org
Advice and support for anyone who provides care.

Grassroots suicide prevention charity: **www.prevent-suicide.org.uk**

MindOut

mindout.org.uk
Mental health service run by and for LGBTQ people.

The Mix

85258 (crisis messenger service, text THEMIX)
themix.org.uk
Support and advice for under 25s, including a crisis messenger service, email and webchat.

National Suicide Prevention Helpline UK

0800 587 0800
spuk.org.uk/national-suicide-prevention-helpline-uk/
Helpline offering a supportive listening service to anyone with thoughts of suicide. Open from 6pm to midnight every day. If you are unable to connect to the main number above you can call 0800 689 0880.

NHS 111 (England)

111
18001 111 (text relay)
NHS 111 BSL service
111.nhs.uk
Non-emergency medical help and advice for people in England. If you call 111, select option 2 to access a 24/7 helpline offering urgent mental health support.

NHS Talking Therapies Talking therapies - NHS

Papyrus HOPELINEUK

0800 068 41 41
88247 (text)

pat@papyrus-uk.org
papyrus-uk.org
Confidential support for under-35s at risk of suicide and others who are concerned about them. Open 24 hours, 7 days a week.

Sane

0300 304 7000
support@sane.org.uk
sane.org.uk
Offers emotional support and information for anyone affected by mental health problems, including a helpline.

Samaritans

116 123 (freephone)
jo@samaritans.org (email response may take several days)
Freepost SAMARITANS LETTERS
samaritans.org

Samaritans are open 24/7 for anyone who needs to talk. You can visit some Samaritans branches in person. Samaritans also have a Welsh Language Line on 0808 164 0123 (7pm–11pm every day).

Shout

85258 (text SHOUT)
giveusashout.org
Confidential 24/7 text service offering support if you're in crisis and need immediate help.

Stay Alive

prevent-suicide.org.uk
App with help and resources for people who feel suicidal or are supporting someone else.

Students Against Depression

studentsagainstdepression.org
Information and support for students experiencing suicidal feelings, including a helpful safety plan template.

Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide (SOBS)

0300 111 5065
support@uksobs.org
uk-sobs.org.uk

Emotional and practical support and local groups for anyone bereaved or affected by suicide.

Switchboard

0800 0119 100
hello@switchboard.lgbt
switchboard.lgbt
Listening services, information and support for LGBTQIA+ people.

Togetherall

togetherall.com
Online mental health community (formerly called Big White Wall). Free in some areas through your GP, employer or university.

The Zero Suicide Alliance (ZSA) is a collaboration of National Health Service trusts, charities, businesses and individuals who are all committed to suicide prevention in the UK and beyond. **http://www.zerosuicidealliance.com**

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Understanding suicidal thoughts | Mental health support | Mind

Suicidal thoughts | Mental Health Foundation

What does suicidal ideation really feel like? | Papyrus

Coping with Suicidal Thoughts

This information has been written using the above websites, and is believed to be correct on the day of writing. This leaflet is not designed to take the place of advice from your GP.

Nikki Fouracre April 2026