

## STEP 2

### Listen and give support

Give them space to explain what is going on for them and how they feel about it. **Acknowledge their feelings:**

- ❖ *“Can you tell me more about what’s going on for you?”*
- ❖ *“If you want to tell me more, I’m here to listen”*
- ❖ *“It sounds like you’re dealing with a lot at the moment”*
- ❖ *“I’m really sorry to hear that you’re feeling like this right now”*

Avoid responses which reject how they are feeling, lessen how they feel, or try to change their view of their situation.

#### Examples of what NOT to say:

- ❖ *“It’s not that bad”*
- ❖ *“Things will get better.”*
- ❖ *“How could you be so selfish?”*

These reactions may make the person feel misunderstood and more isolated than ever. Say that you need to take any threats seriously.

## STEP 3

### Get help

**Tell them you will support them to find the help they need straight away.** Most people do not talk or think about suicide lightly and there may be a serious risk of death. It is important that you accept that the person needs help to stay alive. It is also important to support them in finding the help they need straight away.

**Get professional help.** This person is going to need help and support from others, not just you. It might be a GP or other professional help, or family members or friends. Call **999 or 112** in a crisis (when someone might harm themselves, harm someone else, or is vulnerable to suicide) it is important to get help as quickly as you can for yourself or the person you are concerned about.

**Don’t promise confidentiality.** Let them know that the most important thing is for them to stay safe. It may be helpful to agree together who you can tell. Where possible, support them to tell someone else such as their family doctor/GP. It is important that you;

- ❖ **Remove potential means of suicide**
- ❖ **Don’t leave them alone**  
Keep them safe, stay with them until they get help.
- ❖ **Focus on their positive strengths**  
How have they solved earlier problems? In the past, was there anyone they could rely on in bad times? Is there anyone who might help now?

## Look after yourself

Supporting someone who is experiencing suicidal thoughts can take a toll on you too. It is important to also look after your own mental health and to try not to take on more than you feel comfortable with. Put in place support for yourself so that you can continue to give help.

If necessary seek self-support. You are NOT betraying the individual by turning to others for support for yourself. Talking to someone, joining a support group, or confiding in a trusted friend will help you continue to help others. You don’t need to go into detail or betray confidences; instead focus on your emotions and what you are feeling. Make sure you can be totally honest with the person you turn to — no judging your emotions!

**Training.** There are specific training courses available to help recognise individuals who may have thoughts of suicide and learn how to be able to connect them with support services. If you would like to learn more about specific training courses on suicide awareness contact your local Health and Social Care Trust.

## Finding support

If you are or someone you know is in distress or despair, call LIFELINE on 0808 808 8000 or visit: **[www.lifelinehelpline.info](http://www.lifelinehelpline.info)**

**Samaritans** is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for anyone struggling to cope. Call the free helpline on 116 123.

**In Crisis:** Go to or contact the Emergency Department of your nearest general hospital if someone is in immediate danger. You can also contact the emergency services by calling 999 or 112.

**Contact a local GP or GP Out of Hours Service:** A GP can give you information about the supports available in your area.

**[www.mindingyourhead.info](http://www.mindingyourhead.info)** has information on mental health and the supports and services in Northern Ireland.

Produced as part of the North South cooperation in implementing the Protect Life (Northern Ireland) and Connecting for Life (Republic of Ireland) suicide prevention strategies.

**Lifeline**  
**0808 808 8000**

**HSC** Public Health  
Agency  
Project supported by the PHA

# Concerned about suicide?

When someone is thinking of taking their own life, it is frightening for everyone involved. You might find it hard to understand what they are going through and you might be uncertain as to how you can help. This leaflet has helpful information for anyone concerned about suicide.

Department of  
**Health**  
[www.health-ni.gov.uk](http://www.health-ni.gov.uk)



**Understanding how someone feels when suicidal**

Someone who feels suicidal is generally in a state of extreme emotional pain:

- ❖ They are possibly feeling depressed and very hopeless about the future
- ❖ They may believe nothing will improve, and feel powerless to change anything
- ❖ They may be lost in their feelings and feel overwhelmed
- ❖ They may see themselves as being worthless and as a burden on those around them

These thoughts lead to feelings of guilt and shame. They may believe that it will be best for everyone concerned if they are no longer around. They want to end the pain that they are living with and believe that there is no other solution to the problems that they face.

Although they may have a plan around what they are going to do, many people still wish for and hope for a different option up until the very end.

Reaching out for support and connecting with a non-judgemental person who will listen is the first step towards achieving a positive outcome.

**Recognising that someone is thinking of suicide**

Most people experiencing emotional pain show signs of distress, but the only way to know if someone is thinking of suicide is to ask them. Sometimes, people thinking of suicide may hide the signs so as not to be discovered. This may mean they don’t want help or that they are ashamed because they are not coping and don’t want anyone to know.

The signs listed on the following page are common among people who are experiencing extreme emotional pain and may be considering taking their own life.

*Sometimes we don’t recognise the signs even though they may seem obvious when we look back. This is often because we were too close to the situation at the time.*

**What to watch out for**

- ❖ Withdrawing from friends & family
- ❖ Depression or very low mood (not necessarily a diagnosed mental health problem) which may appear as:
  - loss of interest in usual activities
  - extreme sadness, hopelessness or irritability
  - changes in appetite
  - loss of energy
  - negative comments about self
- ❖ Sudden change from distress to saying they are ‘at peace’ or ‘okay’ (this may indicate that they have decided to take their life)
- ❖ Talking about going away or saying goodbye
- ❖ Threatening suicide
- ❖ Talking or writing about suicide
- ❖ Putting personal affairs in order
- ❖ Giving away the things they own
- ❖ Self-harm or suicide attempt

This is not a full list. Signs can be difficult to recognise. The only way to know for sure if someone is thinking of taking their own life is if they tell you themselves or you ask them directly.

Many people who are thinking of taking their own life do not actually want to die but can’t see any other way out of their situation. They may believe their situation and how they are feeling won’t improve, and feel powerless to create change in their lives.

Their suffering is very real. A person who is thinking about suicide may not ask for help, but that doesn’t mean that help isn’t wanted. You might find it hard to understand and to know what to do.

The next section provides information on what to say to someone who is thinking about suicide.

**What you can say and do to help someone who is thinking about suicide**

It can be very frightening to realise that someone close to you has thought about taking their own life. The following information aims to show you that you don’t have to feel powerless. There is a lot we can do to help someone.

**STEP 1**  
**Approach the person and Ask**

**Let the person know you are concerned about them.** Ask about changes you’ve noticed:

- ❖ *“I noticed some changes in you lately and I am worried about you. I am here if there is anything you would like to talk about.”*
- ❖ *“You don’t seem yourself. Would it help to talk?”*
- ❖ *“How long have you been feeling like this?”*

**Ask about suicide:**

- ❖ *“Are you having thoughts of suicide?”*
- ❖ *“Sometimes when people are feeling... (for example, lonely or hopeless) they may think of ending it all. ‘Are you thinking of suicide?’ ”*

Simply asking the question does not give someone the idea. Thoughts of suicide generally develop slowly over a long time and after a series of difficulties in life. By asking the question, you’re acknowledging their distress and giving them an opportunity to talk about something that is probably very frightening for them. If the answer is yes, they are thinking about suicide, don’t panic. Listen to them without judgement or blame.

