

# Having suicidal thoughts?



Information for you, and for family, whānau, friends and support network



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for the New Zealand Guidelines Group

## CONTENTS

Having Suicidal Thoughts?	1
Asking for Help	1
Who to Ask for Help	2
When You Ask for Help	3
Looking After Yourself	5
Emergency Departments & Mental Health Services	6
<b>If You Are Supporting Someone</b>	<b>8</b>
Further Support	11
Common Misunderstandings	12

The information in this brochure is drawn from the evidence-based guideline, *The Assessment and Management of People at Risk of Suicide*, 2003, published by the New Zealand Guidelines Group.

## HAVING SUICIDAL THOUGHTS?

**It is not uncommon to feel this way.**

Lots of people have suicidal thoughts and have worked through them.

It can feel much worse if you are alone. You don't need to be.

There are people who are willing, able and available to help you.

## ASKING FOR HELP

**Thoughts and feelings of ending your life can be overwhelming and very frightening.**

It can be very difficult to know what to do and how to cope, but help is available.

Although it can be hard, it's **very important** to ask someone you trust to help you or to contact a health practitioner or support organisation (see page 2).

If your request for help isn't heard, ask again. You may need to find someone to assist you to get help.

## WHO TO ASK FOR HELP

### You can ask for help from:

- members of your family, whānau, friends and support network
- your doctor, local medical centre staff or Primary Health Organisation (PHO)
- your local mental health team, crisis response team or Māori Mental Health team. For their numbers:
  - ask your doctor or local medical team, or
  - see listings under 'Hospitals & Other Health Service Providers' in the green pages of your local phone book.
- a counsellor, psychologist or psychiatrist
- a hospital emergency department or after-hours medical centre
- support phone lines, such as Lifeline 0800 543 354, Youthline 0800 376 633 (or text 234) or Samaritans, see your local whitepages for listings. For young people The Lowdown team can provide support at [www.thelowdown.co.nz](http://www.thelowdown.co.nz) or text 5626
- church or spiritual leaders
- other support organisations. See the Personal Help Services section in the front pages of your phone book, ask your local Citizens Advice Bureau or ring the Community Services helpline on 0800 211 211.

In an emergency situation you can call the police or ambulance on 111. They will help keep you safe until you can be seen by a mental health or medical practitioner.

### Dial 111 in emergency situations

## WHEN YOU ASK FOR HELP

**Tell someone you trust that you are having suicidal thoughts. This can be very hard to do, but it's very important.**

If you have a suicide plan, tell the person you trust what you are planning to do.

It can be arranged for a medical or mental health professional to spend some time with you. They will listen to you in private, and ask some questions about you and your situation. This is so they can help you.

It can be a confusing and scary time. Ask any questions you'd like to about what's happening, or ask a support person to ask for you.

You might want to have some of your family, whānau, friends and support network with you. You might not. Say what you want. It's your choice.

If you are very distressed or agitated, it might be suggested that you take some medication, which will help you feel calmer.

To get more information to help you, some staff may ask your family, whānau, friends and support network questions about you and your situation. Staff will attempt to get your permission, but if there is serious concern that you are in danger, they may ask without your consent.

## LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF

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### When you ask for help, you have the right to:

- be respected and taken seriously
- have your distress acknowledged
- speak privately to people about yourself and your situation
- be listened to
- be encouraged to recover
- have your family, whānau, friends or support network with you to help you make decisions about your care, if you choose to
- have your cultural needs acknowledged and supported, if that's what you want.



*I didn't want to tell anyone because of what they'd think of me and I didn't want to worry them with my stuff. Afterwards they said they wished I'd told them sooner what was going on for me. They really wanted to support me. I now realise it would have helped if I'd trusted someone and asked for some help.*



### It's a good idea to do some things to look after yourself.

- Get a good amount of sleep, rest and exercise, and eat regularly
- Remove anything that could be used to harm yourself, or ask others to do this with you
- Talk to someone you trust about what's on your mind, whenever you need to
- Keep a list of phone numbers of people you could call to talk to at any time
- Spend time with people you like
- Take time off work if you need to. Your doctor can help arrange this
- It's a good idea to avoid driving when you're feeling distressed
- It is best not to drink alcohol or take unprescribed or recreational drugs. They can change the way you think and feel, mostly in unhelpful ways
- If you're taking prescribed medications for an illness, don't stop taking them without talking to your doctor first
- Remember that the feelings will pass
- Be kind to yourself

## EMERGENCY DEPARTMENTS & MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

**Your safety and wellbeing is very important. Emergency Departments and Mental Health Services are often busy places, but the aim is that you will be seen by staff within an hour. If you need urgent help tell the receptionist.**

If you have harmed yourself in any way tell someone immediately. You may need treatment and may have to stay in hospital.

When you talk with someone about your situation, you should be able to talk in a quiet and private space.

If you have been drinking a lot of alcohol or have taken drugs you will need to rest in a safe area until you are better able to talk with staff about your situation.

You might like to ask for some support that better meets your cultural needs. This can be arranged, where possible.

Occasionally, some people may need to stay somewhere safe because they are too unwell to go home. If this happens to you, medical staff will talk about this with you. If you want, your family, whānau, friends and support network can be involved in making this decision with you.

Ask about your follow-up appointment. It should be written down for you, along with the name, phone number and address of the person you

will be seeing. This can be written on the Contacts Card below. Keep it somewhere safe so you can refer to it later.

If you are at risk of seriously harming yourself or other people, and you won't accept treatment, the Mental Health (Compulsory Assessment and Treatment) Act 1992 may apply to you. This always involves an assessment by specially trained health practitioners who, in most circumstances, must consult with your family and whānau. If you wish, your friends and support network can be involved.

If the Act applies to you, you will be kept safe in supervised care and treatment may be given to you without your consent. Your situation will be continuously reviewed, and the Act will apply only until you are more able to manage your situation.

For more information see the Ministry of Health's *Guide to the Mental Health (Compulsory Assessment and Treatment) Act 1992* at [www.moh.govt.nz/mentalhealth](http://www.moh.govt.nz/mentalhealth), click on 'Other Mental Health Publications'. A pamphlet, *The Mental Health Act: Information for Families and Whānau*, is also available by calling SFNZ on 0800 500 363 or order at [www.sfnat.org.nz](http://www.sfnat.org.nz).



*It was a really scary and confusing time. It helped when I asked questions, or when I asked someone to ask for me.*



## IF YOU ARE SUPPORTING SOMEONE

### Information for family, whānau, friends and support networks.

You can only do what you are able to do. You cannot be completely responsible for another person's actions.

- If someone has thoughts and feelings about suicide, take them very seriously
- If you are very concerned, get help immediately, contact your doctor or local mental health service. If you need to, call emergency services on 111
- Try to make the environment safe from any means of harm
- If the person is feeling unsafe, or you think they are at high risk, don't leave them alone. You could ask someone else to be with them when you need to leave or need time out
- If they're feeling more settled they might appreciate some time alone. However, don't leave them alone for long periods of time
- Be willing to listen, without judgment. Allow the person opportunities to talk honestly with you
- Understand that the person may not want to talk with you. Offer to help them find someone else to talk to. Sometimes people find it easier to talk freely with someone they don't know personally, such as a counsellor



*I wanted to help him but wasn't sure how. I decided just to do whatever I could and to offer him the kind of support I think I'd need if I was in his situation.*



- The person might be feeling intense emotions, such as anger, guilt or distress. While it may be difficult or uncomfortable for you, allowing them to express these emotions, while respecting the safety of others, is often helpful
- There are many factors that can contribute to a person's suicidal thoughts. Being aware of key warning signs can help. Information about these can be found at [www.spinz.org.nz](http://www.spinz.org.nz), or call Lifeline 0800 543 354, or the Depression Helpline on 0800 111 757, Youthline 0800 376 633 (or text 234) or Samaritans (see your local white pages for listings), or ask your local doctor, medical centre or community mental health team
- Be aware that some situations might make the person more distressed and during these times they may need extra support and encouragement. For example: coming home from hospital or support people not being available for a time or anniversaries
- Look after yourself as well as you can. It's not an easy time for you.
  - Find a support network for yourself
  - Take breaks
  - Keep in touch with others
  - You don't need to be doing this alone. Ask for help if you need it (see page 11)

## FURTHER SUPPORT

It's difficult to always know what to say or do to support the person. Here are some ideas.

### Things to do...

- Believe them and respect them
- Let them know you realise this is very hard for them
- Let them talk honestly about how they think and feel
- Listen well
- Tell them you know their thoughts and feelings are real
- Help them get help
- Try to keep calm
- Show care and encouragement

### Things to avoid...

- Judging or making them feel guilty for feeling as they do
- Laughing at or shaming the person
- Ignoring them
- Getting very angry at them
- Daring them to do it
- Telling them to snap out of it
- Minimising the problem
- Leaving them alone or without support (Support doesn't necessarily have to be provided by you.)

- Crisis phone services are available to talk with you and to listen, such as Lifeline 0800 534 354, Youthline 0800 376 633 (or text 234), Samaritans or the Depression Helpline 0800 111 757, see your local whitepages for listings
- The 'Personal Help Services' section in the first few pages of your phone book has other helpful phone numbers for your area
- Your local Citizens Advice Bureau can tell you about social services in your area – look under 'C' in your phone book. You can also ring the Community Services helpline on 0800 211 211.
- **skylight** 0800 299 100 is an agency set up to support children, young people and their families through change, loss and grief
- Marae support services
- Culturally based community support services
- Church or faith-related support networks
- Mental health support services or groups. Each local area has different kinds of services available. Ask your doctor or your medical centre



*My friend was feeling suicidal. Her daughter asked me to stay with her. So I stayed through the night. The next day, when I felt like a dog's dinner, my friend thanked me for saving her life. It was then that I realised I didn't have to actually do anything. It was enough to just be there, loving and affirming my friend.*



## COMMON MISUNDERSTANDINGS

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**It can be very hard to understand why some people have suicidal thoughts, but we're all unique and will react differently.**

Here are some common misunderstandings about suicide to keep in mind.

**People who talk about suicide won't really do it.**

**FALSE.** *Almost everyone who takes their own life has given some clue or warning. Never ignore suicide threats. Take people's suicidal thoughts and feelings very seriously and help them find effective help.*

**Anyone who tries to end their life is 'crazy'.**

**FALSE.** *Most suicidal people are likely to be extremely distressed, despairing, depressed, grief stricken or in emotional pain – and are not 'crazy'.*

**If a person is determined to take their own life it is because they want to die.**

**FALSE.** *Even the most determined person has mixed feelings about death, moving back and forth between wanting to die and wanting to live. Above all, most people want their pain to stop. With help, a person can be supported back towards wanting to live.*

**Talking about suicide might give someone the idea.**

**FALSE.** *Studies prove that bringing up the issue of suicide with a suicidal person and talking openly about it is one of the most helpful things you can do. When someone talks about suicide it is a cry for help and not a wish to die. Help must be given. Talking together about what the person is feeling lets them know you care and that you want to support them.*

**People who think about suicide are just being selfish.**

**FALSE.** *At times it might feel like the person is being selfish, but mostly they are so overwhelmed by their emotional distress that their ability to manage things is not what it usually is. What they really need is help to come back into balance again.*



*When she listened to me and really heard me – that was what made the biggest difference. Finally someone knew how bad it was for me, completely believed me, cared and helped me find some ways to get into a better space.*





# FURTHER INFORMATION

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More information about suicide risk  
can be found at:

[www.spinz.org.nz](http://www.spinz.org.nz)

[www.headspace.org.nz](http://www.headspace.org.nz)

[www.chmeds.ac.nz/research/suicide/help.htm](http://www.chmeds.ac.nz/research/suicide/help.htm)

[www.nzgg.org.nz](http://www.nzgg.org.nz)

General support advice can be found at:

[www.youthline.co.nz](http://www.youthline.co.nz)

[www.depression.org.nz](http://www.depression.org.nz)

[www.lifeline.org.nz](http://www.lifeline.org.nz)

[www.thelowdown.co.nz](http://www.thelowdown.co.nz)

[www.skylight.org.nz](http://www.skylight.org.nz)

[www.ageconcern.org.nz](http://www.ageconcern.org.nz)

[www.sfnat.org.nz](http://www.sfnat.org.nz)

[www.balance.org.nz](http://www.balance.org.nz)

[www.mentalhealth.org.nz](http://www.mentalhealth.org.nz)

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Copies are available free from:

- Wickliffe 04 496 2277 Order No. HP: 4073
- [www.nzgg.org.nz](http://www.nzgg.org.nz) – click on 'Guidelines/Publications', then 'Mental Health'
- [info@nzgg.org.nz](mailto:info@nzgg.org.nz)



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