

How to Talk About Suicide Safely

Conversations about suicide can save lives when done safely and compassionately. This guide offers practical steps for opening supportive dialogue while minimizing harm.

- Start with openness: Ask directly but gently, e.g., 'Are you thinking about suicide?'
- Use nonjudgmental language—avoid words like 'crazy' or 'selfish.'
- Listen more than you speak; create space for them to share.
- Acknowledge their feelings: 'It sounds like you're in a lot of pain.'
- Avoid minimizing or offering quick fixes—focus on empathy.
- Do not promise secrecy; safety comes first.
- Encourage professional help: connect them with a therapist or crisis resource.
- If there is immediate risk, call 988 (Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, US) or emergency services.
- After the conversation, follow up—check in regularly to show continued support.



WARNING SIGNS OF SUICIDE:

The behaviors listed below may be some of the signs that someone is thinking about suicide.

TALKING ABOUT:



- ▷ Wanting to die
- ▷ Great guilt or shame
- ▷ Being a burden to others

FEELING:



- ▷ Empty, hopeless, trapped, or having no reason to live
- ▷ Extremely sad, more anxious, agitated, or full of rage
- ▷ Unbearable emotional or physical pain

CHANGING BEHAVIOR, SUCH AS:



- ▷ Making a plan or researching ways to die
- ▷ Withdrawing from friends, saying goodbye, giving away important items, or making a will
- ▷ Taking dangerous risks such as driving extremely fast
- ▷ Displaying extreme mood swings
- ▷ Eating or sleeping more or less
- ▷ Using drugs or alcohol more often

If these warning signs apply to you or someone you know, get help as soon as possible, particularly if the behavior is new or has increased recently.

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline
Call or text 988
Chat at 988lifeline.org



National Institute
of Mental Health

www.nimh.nih.gov/suicideprevention

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