



TOOL KIT:

Suicide Prevention Information for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people

What keeps us strong?

Culture, country, law, storytelling, language, art, music, dance, family, hunting, fishing, work, and sport. Our people have strong culture. We are artists and storytellers, we are sporting legends and skilled hunters, we are musicians and dancers and uncles and aunties and grandmothers and grandfathers. Most of all we are teachers, and we are teaching our children to find their way in a modern world. Our kids need a guide to find their way ... they need to take our culture with them.... to bring both worlds into one. (Aboriginal Mental Health Worker).

Culture and suicide

As Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people we are more at risk of self-harm and suicide because of our many experiences of loss and grief. We can feel disconnected from our culture, our land and our identity. We can feel alone and separated. Many of us also struggle with drugs and alcohol, or violence which can cause us stress and sadness and lead to thoughts of suicide. Talking with people who know and understand our ways will be particularly important. This information will help us work out what we can do and who can help when we are worried about self-harm or suicide.

There are times when I get down, I stop doing my hobbies like music and art, I think I'm no good and not worth anything, I tend to reach for a drink or a drug to escape... and there are times ...when I've really thought about hurting myself. Now I know what it is that gets me down and I try to reach out to family for help. My auntie watches out for me and helps me through the dark times.

Risk factors

We are more at risk when:

- We are going through tough times
- Someone in our family or community has taken their life through suicide
- We are drinking too much alcohol or taking drugs
- We are sad or worried or have mental or physical illness
- We are alone
- We have harmed ourselves before

After my son passed away I just wanted to go to the cemetery all the time to be with him. I was drinking too much and fighting with my husband all the time. Then I realised my other children needed me too and I went to rehab and went back to my work. It was a long road but I'm getting there.

Warning Signs

Some warning signs of self-harm or suicidal thoughts are:

- Talking or joking about death or suicide
- Showing we are thinking about death through our drawings, stories, songs, etc.
- Saying goodbye to people, giving away things, settling old or ongoing issues
- Increasing alcohol or drug use
- Not wanting to be around friends, family, or the community
- Risky or self-destructive behaviour
- Talking of feeling hopeless, helpless or worthless
- Not taking care of ourselves and our appearance
- Suddenly feeling at peace (deciding that suicide will offer a way out)
- Being moody, sad, or angry
- Losing interest in things we usually enjoy

- Just not seeming to be ourselves

I was sitting inside all the time not going out, not sleeping, up all night. I even tried to overdose myself ...then what got me out of that was thinking about my kids who were there for me and thinking that I needed to make changes in my life. Now I am a health worker and I help my people and my community. Many people think about suicide. Most will get through the hard times with the help and support of family, friends, health professionals and the community. The following tips will help us know what to do, whether we are worried about ourselves or someone else.

1 Act now

If we are having suicidal thoughts, or someone we know is thinking of suicide, now is the time to do something. Getting help straight away could be what saves a life.

2 Have a yarn

Talking with someone who cares helps us feel less alone. It helps to yarn about how we are feeling.

3 Share thoughts of suicide

Asking the question is the only way we can really know if a person is thinking about suicide. Talking about it will not put the idea into someone's head. Things can seem a lot better after we have spoken about our problems.

4 Keep safe

If the answer to any of the following questions is yes, there is greater risk of self-harm or suicide:

- Access to ways to self-harm (drugs, guns, knives, etc.)?
- Previous attempts at self-harm or suicide?
- Thoughts about how to do it?
- Thoughts about when to do it?
- Not many people around for support?

If the answer is yes to any of the risks listed above, we must do whatever we can to keep ourselves or the person we are worried about safe. If possible and without putting ourselves in danger, we need to remove any items or objects (knives, guns, car keys, medications) that can be used for self-harm or suicide. Then, TAKE ACTION and put a safety plan in place.

5 Stay connected

Do not keep thoughts of self-harm or suicide a secret.

Seek help from:

- Family and friends
- An Elder or other community member
- Doctor, Counsellor, Psychologist, Social Worker or any other health professional
- Mental Health service providers
- Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Health Service or any other local Health Centre
- Support Groups
- Religious Ministers
- School counsellors, youth group leaders, sports coaches etc.

6 Stay connected

Having a clear safe plan is important to help us through step by step when we are having thoughts of suicide. Your safe plan should include:

- Contact details of a support person we trust
- A plan for steps and actions to take with our support person to ensure our safety
- Contact details of a support service or professional for extra support



Places to go for help now:

Call Lifeskills Australia on 1800 870 080 for 24/7 crisis care. Call the police or ambulance on 000 if you are concerned about a friend.

This tool kit was developed with content input and advice from the Aboriginal and Islander Mental Health Initiative at Menzies School of Health Research – AIMHI/Menzies.edu.au