

## What does it mean to be suicidal?

Feeling suicidal? You are not alone ... every year approximately 400,000 Australians experience suicidal thoughts<sup>1</sup>, 62,000 make suicide attempts<sup>2</sup>, 35,000 are admitted to hospital for suicide-related injuries<sup>3</sup> and over 3,000 die from suicide<sup>4</sup>. But help is available.

### Reasons for suicide

The reasons why people think about suicide are varied and personal. Often, it is because of a combination of factors related to their feelings or thoughts, or they may have recently experienced a 'triggering' event.

People thinking about suicide may feel:

- like suicide is their only way out
- alone, isolated and disconnected from the world around them
- helpless
- an unbearable amount of pain
- that no one understands them or that they are a burden
- that nothing will change to improve their situation.

Some 'triggering' events that may cause someone to consider suicide include:

- relationship break downs
- recent loss (a loved one, job, relationship, pet or public figure)
- family problems
- physical illness or injury
- sexual, physical or emotional abuse
- drug or alcohol problems
- mental illness, including schizophrenia, bipolar disorder and depression
- eating disorders

- school, uni or work problems
- unemployment or being unemployed for a long time
- feeling like they don't belong anywhere
- financial or legal problems
- major disappointments
- change in circumstances (retirement, separation, children leaving home).

### Warning signs

Almost everyone who takes their own life gives some clue or warning. Never ignore talking about suicide. Take people's suicidal thoughts and feelings very seriously and help them find effective help. If you suspect that someone may have suicidal thoughts, ask them. This will give them permission to talk about it. Asking about suicidal thinking does not precipitate suicidal action.

There are a number of warning signs that a person might be thinking about suicide. Some of these include:

- discussions surrounding suicide, even if it seems to be a joke
- being moody, withdrawn or sad (Note: a sudden positive mood can also be a bad sign as it may mean a person has made up their mind to suicide)
- losing interest in things they previously enjoyed
- taking less care of their appearance
- anxiety or agitation, including difficulty concentrating or sleeping
- engaging in self-destructive or risky behaviour
- increased use of alcohol or drugs
- previous suicide attempts
- giving possessions away and saying goodbye
- gaining access to a means of ending their life
- unusual behaviour, including a happy disposition.

## What you can do to help others

- **Reach Out** — Ask them directly if they are thinking about suicide. It needs to be a direct question that can't be misinterpreted. "Are you thinking about suicide?" Most people with thoughts of suicide want to talk about it. They want to live — but desperately need someone to hear their pain and offer them help to keep safe. Don't be afraid to ask them if they are thinking about suicide. This shows you care and they're not alone.
- **Listen to them** — Allow them to express their feelings. Let them do most of the talking. They will often feel a great sense of relief that someone wants to talk to them about their darkest thoughts.
- **Check their safety** — If you are worried don't leave them alone. Remove any means of suicide including weapons, medications, drugs, alcohol, even access to a car. Get help by calling Lifeskills Australia, or emergency services on 000. You can also take them to the local hospital emergency department.
- **Decide what to do and take action** — Talk about steps you can take together to keep them safe. Don't agree to keep it a secret, you shouldn't be the only one supporting this person. You may need help from someone else to persuade them to get help.

You can also help by finding out information on what resources and services are available for a person who is considering suicide. Provide them a list of emergency numbers in case they need it later.

- **Get help** — There are lots of services and people that can help and provide assistance.
  - ▶ GP (doctor)
  - ▶ Counsellor, psychologist, social worker
  - ▶ School Counsellor
  - ▶ Emergency Services 000
  - ▶ Community Health Centres
  - ▶ Crisis support services like Lifeline, Kids helpline

► Seek support from family and friends, youth group leader, sports coach, priest, minister or religious leader etc. In some situations a person might refuse help. In these cases, ensure the appropriate people are aware of the situation. Don't shoulder the situation yourself. If they are unable to stay safe you may have to contact help against their wishes, but talk to them about this first if possible.

Where to go for support? Are you having thoughts of suicide? It's OK. We can talk about it. Thinking about suicide does not make you 'bad' or 'weak'. There are people you can turn to for help, such as the [Lifeskills Australia](#) team. Please call 1800 870 080 or email [info@lifeskillsaustralia.com.au](mailto:info@lifeskillsaustralia.com.au) to speak to a clinician now.