

Suicide Recognition and Support

Practical steps for family, friends and responders

Recognize when someone needs help

You do not need to diagnose someone to take a concern seriously. A calm conversation and timely connection to help can make a difference.

Get help now

U.S. crisis support: Call or text 988, or chat at 988lifeline.org. You can contact 988 for yourself or because you are worried about someone else.

For an immediate life-threatening emergency, call 911. If someone says they intend to kill themselves, stay with them while getting help if you can do so safely.

Notice changes and warning signs

Seek help promptly, especially when behavior is new or increasing. Do not wait for several signs to appear.

- Talking about wanting to die, being a burden, unbearable pain, or having no reason to live.
- Feeling trapped, hopeless, intensely ashamed, very agitated, or unusually angry.
- Making a suicide plan, researching ways to die, saying goodbye, or giving away valued belongings.
- Withdrawing from people, taking dangerous risks, or showing marked changes in mood, sleep, eating, or substance use.

Ask clearly and listen

Say what you have noticed: 'You have seemed overwhelmed, and I care about you.' Then ask directly: 'Are you thinking about suicide?' Asking does not put the idea into someone's mind.

Listen without arguing, judging, or rushing to reassure. Thank them for telling you. You can say, 'I'm glad you told me. Let's get support together.'

Help them take the next step

Ask whether they have a plan or access to something they could use to harm themselves. Help reduce access to firearms, medicines, or other lethal means when this can be done safely. Do not put yourself in danger.

Offer to call 988 together or help them reach a mental health professional. Do not promise to keep suicidal thoughts secret.

Keep support going

Connection matters beyond the first call. Make the next step specific, and keep in touch after a crisis or discharge from care.

For family and friends

- Choose a quiet moment and describe the changes you have noticed. Leave room for the person's own words.
- Offer practical help: sit with them during a call, help arrange an appointment, or accompany them to care.
- Ask who else they trust. Involve supportive people rather than trying to carry the situation alone.
- Ask how you can support a safety plan made with a clinician or crisis counselor. Check in again at an agreed time.

For coworkers and responders

- Start privately when possible: 'I've noticed a change since that call. How are you doing?'
- Offer a trusted peer, chaplain, EAP provider, or clinician as a connection to support. Ask the service about privacy practices and their limits.
- If there is an immediate safety concern, get emergency help and follow applicable workplace safety procedures. Do not leave the person to find help alone.
- Follow up after a difficult incident, referral, or return from care. A brief, specific check-in can help keep the connection open.

Keep the conversation open

Avoid guilt, threats, debates about beliefs, or promises that everything will be fine. Offer steady presence: 'You matter to me. We can work on the next step together.'

Faith and spiritual care can be sources of comfort. Include them according to the person's wishes alongside needed crisis and clinical support.

Write down the next step

A person or service we will contact: _____

When and how we will connect: _____

My next check-in: _____

You can ask for help too

Call or text 988 for guidance when you are concerned about someone. Call 911 for immediate life-threatening danger.

For ongoing chaplain support: Leo@HopeChaplain.com | 503.819.9481. For urgent help, use 988 or 911 as described above.

Prepared by Hope Chaplain using current National Institute of Mental Health guidance.

Sources [NIMH: Warning Signs of Suicide](#) | [NIMH: 5 Action Steps to Help Someone Having Thoughts of Suicide](#) | [NIMH: Frequently Asked Questions About Suicide](#)