

Suicide Prevention

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Canada Suicide Prevention Service

1-833-456-4566

Crisis Text Line

Text "HELLO" to 741741

Suicide Prevention

Considering suicide or self-harming isn't a typical response to stress. Know this.

Considering suicide or self-harming is a response that requires immediate help. Believe this.

If you or someone you know is in crisis, act like it's a medical emergency because it is.

Dear Readers,

I am someone who has lived experience with self-harming and suicidal thinking. These experiences began in my preteens and nearly took me down on more than one occasion.

I didn't think I would survive myself.
But I did. And I am. Every day.

I want you to know that it's possible to find the right treatment and that many other options exist if one path isn't providing enough relief or one stops working for you (which can and does happen when you live with mental illness).

I also want you to know this isn't your fault—and you're not making it up. I believe you and encourage you to talk to a doctor or mental health professional ASAP.

-Michelle

Suicide Prevention

Why talk about suicide?

At any given time, around 1 in 25 people is thinking about suicide to some degree (Credit: LivingWorks).

Talking about suicide doesn't cause suicide but it could save a life.

Talking about suicide lets people know they're not alone in their thoughts and that resources are available to help. If you're not sure where to begin, the Canadian Mental Health Association advises:

"Be direct.

We know that talking to someone about suicide won't cause or increase suicidal thoughts, or cause the person to act on them. It can help them feel less isolated and scared.

Be hopeful. People can and do get better.

Encourage people to seek help."

Suicide is preventable.

What is suicidal thinking?



Suicidal thinking is when someone thinks about suicide. There are two categories of suicidal thinking:

Passive suicidal thinking & Active suicidal thinking.

Passive suicidal thinking is when someone thinks about hurting themselves in order to stop living. **Passive suicidal thinking can evolve or progress to active suicidal thinking, which is all the more reason why you should always take thinking or talking of suicide seriously.**

It can happen to anyone.

Yes, even children.

Active suicidal thinking is when someone makes a plan to hurt themselves in order to stop living.

It can happen to anyone.

Yes, even children.

Warning signs of suicide

Knowing the signs of suicide can help you notice changes in yourself or others. These signs are adapted from the National Institute of Mental Health, Canada Suicide Prevention Service, and SAVE (Suicide Awareness Voices of Education).

If you do see signs, please tell someone. **If you're worried about yourself or someone else, dial 9-1-1.** It's always better to speak up than stay silent. Your voice could help save a life.

If you're thinking about suicide, are worried about a friend or loved one, the Canada Suicide Prevention Service is also available 24/7 for voice and 4pm to 12am ET (1pm-9pm PT) for text. Learn more: <https://www.crisisservicescanada.ca/en/>

If you see messages or live streaming content that suggests someone is actively engaging in suicidal behavior, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255) or 9-1-1.

Many things contribute to someone considering suicide. Some of the risk factors may be personal (individual), relationship, community, and societal.

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Review these signs a few times

- Talking about death, wanting to die, or wanting to kill themselves
- Talking about not wanting to be alive anymore
- Talking about feeling empty or hopeless or having no reason to live / nothing to stay alive for
- Talking about feeling stuck, trapped, imprisoned, or without any other options
- Feeling severe (life-altering) emotional or physical pain
- Withdrawing from family and friends (may look like ditching plans, avoiding calls, disconnecting emotionally, and breaking bonds)
- Giving away important (ie., sentimental, valuable, necessary, adored) possessions
- Saying goodbye to friends and family or putting pressure on making amends
- Putting affairs in order, such as making a will
- Taking great risks that could lead to death, such as driving extremely fast
- Talking or thinking about death often

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Warning signs of suicide, continued

- Displaying extreme mood swings, suddenly changing from very sad to very calm or happy
- Making a plan or looking for ways to kill themselves, such as searching for lethal methods online, stockpiling pills, or buying a gun
- Talking about feeling great guilt or shame
- Using alcohol or drugs more often
- Acting anxious or agitated
- Changing eating or sleeping habits
- Showing rage or talking about seeking revenge

This is not a tally sheet.

***Even a single sign from this list means
it's time to talk to a mental health
professional.***

Signs in Youth

- Talking about, posting online about, or making plans for suicide
- Expressing hopelessness or despair about the future
- Displaying severe/overwhelming emotional pain or distress
- Showing worrisome behavioral cues or marked changes in behavior, particularly in the presence of the warning signs above. Examples include:
 - Withdrawal from or changing in social connections/situation
 - Changes in sleep (increased or decreased)
 - Changes in food consumption (increased or decreased)
 - Anger or hostility that seems out of character or out of context
 - Recent increased agitation or irritability

Why some but not others?

Most of us who have risk factors for suicide won't act on suicidal thinking, according to the National Institute for Mental Health (2021). Some of us will, though. While we don't exactly know "why," we do know risk factors play a role.

Major Risk Factors Include

- A history of suicidal behaviours
- Depressive or other mental disorders
- Substance use disorder
- Chronic pain
- Family history of a mental disorder or substance use
- Family history of suicide
- Exposure to family violence, including physical or sexual abuse
- Presence of guns or other firearms in the home
- Having recently been released from prison or jail
- Exposure, either directly or indirectly, to others' suicidal behavior, such as that of family members, peers, or celebrities
- Stressful or major life events like divorce, job loss, legal troubles, domestic violence, sexual assault and other traumas

Risk Factors Aren't Fate, But They Do Matter

Matters of mental health and illness are complex - always. It is never the case you can say that X lead to Y (ie. breakups and divorces don't cause suicide, but they may play a contributing role). There will always be multiple factors at play and none can be isolated as the "reason why."

The best we can do is:

Work to prevent risk factors (if possible; some things are out of your control)

Understand personal triggers that increase risk (ie., drinking and doing certain drugs)

Take action to support mental wellbeing to counter triggers

A Story about Supporting Mental Wellbeing

This is a journey that will look different for everyone. I can tell you from personal experience and from working with medical professionals on my own journey that this is not a linear progression to "happiness."

In fact, waiting for "happiness" to come as a result of taking antidepressants, doing talk therapy, exercising, eating and sleeping better, taking supplements, quitting drinking, and on and on and on only actually brought me further to a place of despair.

My mind said, "Look. Even now. Even after all you have done to heal yourself up, you are still bleeding. Pathetic. You will never be happy. See?"

This Much I Know

Suicide prevention is a big topic. I would love to tell you that if you call or text a suicide helpline, you will get exactly what you need but I also know this isn't always the case. Please do not let one lackluster or disappointing reach out for help stop you from trying again. The right help is available but since we are all so different, we might not always get what we need from one source. We must continue to try.

When it becomes too much (e.g. I am too exhausted to fight), here are some things I do:

- Nap (the world looks better through rested eyes)
- Sit in a bath filled with salts and essential oils and cry while hugging my knees close to my chest
- Groom, pet, lay beside my cat (she's not a cuddler)
- Drink a glass of water and do a body scan (where am I feeling 'pain' physical or emotional)?
- Read content online or in books from people with lived experience who have survived themselves

This Much I Know

Suicide prevention is much more powerful when we address how to prevent the risk factors (ie., how to reduce poverty, addiction, chronic illness, domestic violence, etc.)

When these factors remain in our society, and when you see other traumatic events like pandemics and climate disasters destroying livelihoods, it can be difficult to find hope for the future. It can be particularly easy to say, "Well it's all fucked, so of course I am fucked, too."

From someone who has been there: It is not ALL fucked, and neither are you. When I'm feeling like it's all fucked, though, I turn to growing things and spending time in nature. Witnessing how the world continues to grow and evolve, despite, reminds me that I can too.

Happiness isn't the goal

"I just want you to be happy," she says, again, feeling like it's the right thing to say. Feeling like allows me freedom to roam this world with wide eyes, hopeful.

It doesn't.

I can do almost anything else. I graduated at the top of my district. I built houses in Cambodia. I have survived anorexia nervosa.

But happiness is what she wants. "I wish you wouldn't ask for the one thing I can't promise..."

"Are you happy?" asks my prescribing doctor. I laugh. "No! But I don't want to die today so I'll take it. I'm not looking for happiness."

I just want peace in my own mind.

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