

Coping with suicidal thoughts: the first steps

Step #1: Promise not to do anything right now

Even though you're in a lot of pain right now, give yourself some distance between thoughts and action. Make a promise to yourself: "I will wait 24 hours and won't do anything drastic during that time." Or, wait a week.

Thoughts and actions are two different things—your suicidal thoughts do not have to become a reality. There's no deadline, no one pushing you to act on these thoughts immediately. Wait. Wait and put some distance between your suicidal thoughts and suicidal action.

Step #2: Avoid drugs and alcohol

Suicidal thoughts can become even stronger if you have taken drugs or alcohol. It is important to not use nonprescription drugs or alcohol when you feel hopeless or are thinking about suicide.

Step #3: Make your home safe

Remove things you could use to hurt yourself, such as pills, knives, razors, or firearms. If you are unable to do so, go to a place where you can feel safe. If you are thinking of taking an overdose, give your medicines to someone who can return them to you one day at a time as you need them.

Step #4: Take hope - people DO get through this

Even people who feel as badly as you are feeling now manage to survive these feelings. Take hope in this. There is a very good chance that you are going to live through these feelings, no matter how much self-loathing, hopelessness, or isolation you are currently experiencing. Just give yourself the time needed and don't try to go it alone.

Step #5: Don't keep these suicidal feelings to yourself

Many of us have found that the first step to coping with suicidal thoughts and feelings is to share them with someone we trust. It may be a friend, a therapist, a member of the clergy, a teacher, a family doctor, a coach, or an experienced counselor at the end of a helpline. Find someone you trust and let them know how bad things are. Don't let fear, shame, or embarrassment prevent you from seeking help. Just talking about how you got to this point in your life can release a lot of the pressure that's building up and help you find a way to cope.

Why do I feel this way?

Many kinds of emotional pain can lead to thoughts of suicide. The reasons for this pain are unique to each one of us, and our ability to cope with the pain differs from person to person. Don't listen to anyone who tells you, "That's not enough to be suicidal about." We are all different. What might be bearable to one person may not be bearable to you. There are, however, some common factors that may lead us to experience suicidal thoughts and feelings.

Feeling suicidal is often associated with problems that can be treated

Loss, depression, anxiety disorders, medical conditions, drug and alcohol dependency, financial, legal or school problems, grief or loss, and other life difficulties can all create profound emotional distress. They also interfere with our ability to problem solve. Even if you can't see it now, there are nearly always other solutions for these problems.

Mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety, and bipolar disorder are all treatable with changes in lifestyle, therapy, and medication. Most people who seek help for their problems and make constructive changes in their lives improve their situation and recover. Even if you have received treatment for a disorder before, or if you've already made attempts to solve your problems, you should know that it's often necessary to try several different solutions before the right solution or combination of solutions can be found. Almost all problems can be treated or resolved.

Why suicide can seem like the only option

If you are unable to think of solutions other than suicide, it is not that other solutions don't exist, but rather that you are currently unable to see them. The intense emotional pain that you're experiencing right now can distort your thinking so it becomes harder to see possible solutions to problems, or to connect with those who can offer support. Therapists, counselors, or friends or loved ones, can help you to see solutions that otherwise may not be apparent to you. Give them a chance to help.

A suicidal crisis is almost always temporary

Although it might seem as if your pain and unhappiness will never end, it is important to realize that crises are usually temporary. Solutions are often found, feelings change, unexpected positive events occur. Remember: suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem. Give yourself the time necessary for things to change and the pain to subside.

Reaching out for help

Even if it doesn't feel like it right now, **there are many people who want to support you during this difficult time.** They won't try to argue with you about how miserable you feel or tell you to just "snap out of it." They will not judge you. They will simply listen to you and be there for you.

Reach out to someone. Do it now. If you promised yourself 24-hours or a week in step #1, use that time to tell someone what's going on with you. You can call a trusted friend, family member, minister, rabbi, doctor, or therapist. It doesn't matter who it is, as long as it's someone you trust and who is likely to listen with compassion and acceptance.

If you don't know who to turn to:

In the U.S. – Call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255) or the National Hopeline Network at 1-800-SUICIDE (1-800-784-2433). These toll-free crisis hotlines offer 24-hour suicide prevention and support. Your call is free and confidential.

Outside the U.S. – Visit [Befrienders Worldwide](#) to find a helpline in your country.

How to talk to someone about your suicidal thoughts

Even when you've decided who you can trust to talk to, admitting your suicidal thoughts to another person can be difficult.

- Tell the person exactly what you are telling yourself. If you have a suicide plan, explain it to them.
- Phrases such as, 'I can't take it anymore' or 'I'm done' are vague and do not illustrate how serious things really are. Tell the person you trust that you are thinking about suicide.
- If it is too difficult for you to talk about, try writing it down and handing a note to the person you trust. Or send them an email or text and sit with them while they read it.

What if you don't feel understood?

If you do not feel the person you have chosen to talk to has understood, tell someone else, or call a suicide crisis helpline. There are plenty of people out there who will understand. Don't let one bad experience stop you from finding someone who can help.

Ways to cope with suicidal thoughts and feelings

Remember that while it may seem as if these suicidal thoughts and feelings will never end, this is never a permanent condition. **You WILL feel better again.** In the meantime, there are some ways to help cope with your suicidal thoughts and feelings.

Things to do

- **Talk with someone every day, preferably face to face.** Though you feel like withdrawing, ask trusted friends and acquaintances to spend time with you. Or continue to call a crisis helpline and talk about your feelings.
- **Make a safety plan.** Develop a set of steps that you can follow during a suicidal crisis. It should include contact numbers for your doctor or therapist, as well as friends and family members who will help in an emergency.
- **Make a written schedule** for yourself every day and stick to it, no matter what. Keep a regular routine as much as possible, even when your feelings seem out of control.
- **Get out in the sun** or into nature for at least 30 minutes a day.
- **Exercise** as vigorously as is safe for you. To get the most benefit, aim for 30 minutes of exercise per day. But you can start small. Three 10-minute bursts of activity can have a positive effect on mood.
- **Make time for things that bring you joy.** Even if very few things bring you pleasure at the moment, force yourself to do the things you used to enjoy.
- **Remember your personal goals.** You may have always wanted to travel to a particular place, read a specific book, own a pet, move to another place, learn a new hobby, volunteer, go back to school, or start a family. Write your personal goals down.

Things to avoid:

- **Being alone.** Solitude can make suicidal thoughts even worse. Visit a friend, or family member. If you have no one, pick up the phone and call a crisis helpline.
- **Alcohol and drugs.** Drugs and alcohol can increase depression, hamper your problem-solving ability, and can make you act impulsively.
- **Doing things that make you feel worse.** Listening to sad music, looking at certain photographs, reading old letters, or visiting a loved one's grave can all increase negative feelings.
- **Thinking about suicide and other negative thoughts.** Try not to become preoccupied with suicidal thoughts as this can make them even stronger. Don't think and rethink negative thoughts. Find a distraction. Giving yourself a break from suicidal thoughts can help, even if it's for a short time.

Recovering from suicidal feelings

Even if your suicidal thoughts and feelings have subsided, get help for yourself. Experiencing that sort of emotional pain is itself a traumatizing experience. Finding a support group or therapist can be very helpful in decreasing the chances that you will feel suicidal again in the future. You can get help and referrals from your doctor or from the organizations listed in our Related Links section.

5 steps to recovering from suicidal thoughts and feelings

- **Identify triggers or situations** that lead to feelings of despair or generate suicidal thoughts, such as an anniversary of a loss, alcohol, or stress from relationships. Find ways to avoid these places, people, or situations.
- **Take care of yourself.** Eat right, don't skip meals, and get plenty of sleep. Exercise is also key: it releases endorphins, relieves stress, and promotes emotional well-being.
- **Build your support network.** Surround yourself with positive influences and people who make you feel good about yourself. The more you're invested in other people and your community, the more you have to lose—which will help you stay positive and on the recovery track.
- **Develop new activities and interests.** Find new hobbies, volunteer activities, or work that gives you a sense of meaning and purpose. When you're doing things you find fulfilling, you'll feel better about yourself and feelings of despair are less likely to return.
- **Learn to deal with stress in a healthy way.** Find healthy ways to keep your stress levels in check, including exercising, meditating, using sensory strategies to relax, practicing simple breathing exercises, and challenging self-defeating thoughts.