Connecting and Responding to Suicidal Thoughts in Survivors

ODVN Resource Guide
The following document is to be used to provide support to survivors who are at risk of or exhibiting signs of suicidality.

Utilize this guide to...

- understand the warning signs of suicide
- identify protective factors against suicide
- prepare and engage in conversations about suicide
- explore how to navigate, respond to, and safety plan with survivors who are suicidal
- gain insight into resources that are available

This document was funded through the HealthPath Foundation Grant.
STEP 1: RECOGNIZE WARNING SIGNS

Pay attention to language, behavior, and life experiences that may point to suicidality in survivors

LANGUAGE: DIRECT & INDIRECT

Direct: "I want to die"; "I wish I were dead"; "I am going to kill myself"; "I don't want to live anymore"

Indirect: "I want out"; "I can't go on any longer"; "I won't be around much longer"; "My family would be better off without me"; "You won't have to worry about me much longer"

BEHAVIOR

Access to guns/acquiring new guns; co-occurring depression or other mental health challenges; giving away personal belongings; getting “affairs” in order; hoarding medications; substance use; increased irritability, anger, and/or aggression

LIFE EXPERIENCES

Extreme stress, isolation, loss of freedom in relationships; loss of financial security; recent, unwanted move/relocation; death of a loved one
STEP 2: IDENTIFY PROTECTIVE FACTORS

Recognize the individual, communal, and societal factors that may protect survivors from suicidal thoughts and behaviors.

- Access to effective, culturally competent resources
- Connectedness to others
- Strong support system
- Effective coping and problem-solving skills
- Sense of independence
STEP 3: HAVE THE CONVERSATION

Prepare yourself to engage in dialogue with survivors who may be suicidal

- Have knowledge of community resources that are available, including state and local suicide prevention foundations and coalitions
- Notice and acknowledge your own potential discomfort with talking about suicide
- Create a space for privacy and safety
- Demonstrate active listening, empathy, and non-judgment
STEP 3: HAVE THE CONVERSATION (CONTINUED)

Prepare yourself to engage in dialogue with survivors who may be suicidal

MENTION WARNING SIGNS YOU HAVE NOTICED

ASK THE SURVIVOR IF THEY ARE SUICIDAL

Direct: "Are you thinking about killing yourself?"; "Are you having thoughts of suicide?"; "Are you thinking about ending your own life?"; "Sometimes when people are hurting as much as you seem to be, they may wish they weren't alive. Are you feeling that you don't want to be alive?"

Indirect: “Have you ever been so unhappy that you wish it all would end?”; “Sometimes when people go through similar situations to what you’re going through, they might find themselves in unimaginable pain, and may even wish they could go to bed and never wake up. I wonder if you have felt that way?”; “Have you been very unhappy lately?”

THINGS TO AVOID SAYING

“You wouldn’t kill yourself, would you?”; “You’re not thinking about doing anything stupid like suicide, are you?”; “Suicide is selfish. Are you even thinking about your kids/family?”
STEP 4: RESPOND

Be ready to compassionately and effectively respond to survivors, regardless of their answer.

IF THE ANSWER IS "NO":

Pay attention to **nonverbal cues** and **possible discrepancies** between what they’re saying and how they’re acting/body language (i.e.: eye contact, defensive posture). In this case, you may need to persist by asking the question in a different way.

If the “no” is truly a “no”, reassure the survivor that **you are there for them** and that you just wanted to check-in.
STEP 4: RESPOND (CONTINUED)

Be ready to compassionately and effectively respond to survivors, regardless of their answer.

IF THE ANSWER IS "YES":

- **Thank them** for opening up and trusting you.
- **Acknowledge that you care for them:** "I want you here"; “You matter to me”; “I am on your side”; “I want you to live”.
- **Create space for choice and action:** “Thoughts of suicide are heavy burdens for you to carry by yourself. Would you let me partner with you to work through this? I know of some resources that I think would be helpful.”
- **Help them** make calls, schedule an appointment, go with them to appointments if possible.
- **Offer referral information** to crisis hotlines and/or text lines and other local community resources.
STEP 5: CREATE A SAFETY PLAN

Work collaboratively with the survivor to complete a safety plan regarding suicidality.

Work with the survivor to complete the Suicidality Safety Plan template (available through ODVN).

Include warning signs, identify coping skills, name close people whom they could find support from, list professionals/agencies they can contact during a crisis.
STEP 6: FOLLOW UP AND OFFER ONGOING SUPPORT

Circle back to the conversation and continue to provide support and resources when needed

Commit to reaching out the next day via phone call, email, text, in person, etc.
National Suicide Prevention Hotline
Call: 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
En Español: 1-888-628-9454
Text: 4HOPE to 741-741

National Network to End Domestic Violence
https://www.nnedv.org

Support for Stressful Times
https://www.odvn.org

Ohio Suicide Prevention Foundation
https://www.ohiospf.org