

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



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"

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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

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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



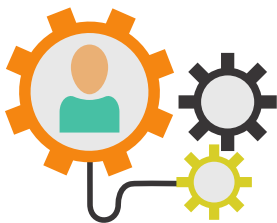
Access to effective, culturally competent resources



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

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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?"

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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 (ie: 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



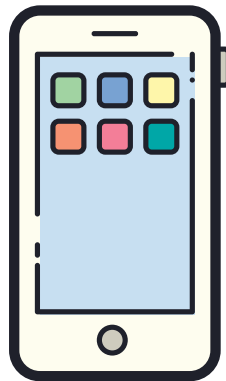
Work with the survivor to complete the Suicidality Safety Plan template (available through ODVN)



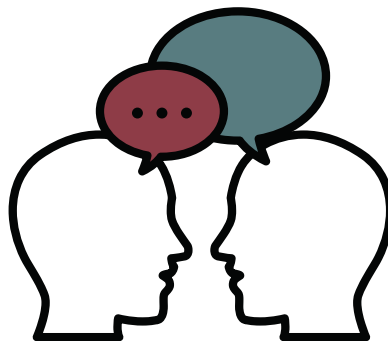
Include warning signs, identify coping skills, name close people whom they could find support from, list professionals/agencies they can contact during a crisis

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.



RESOURCES

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>