



Suicide – a guide to helping young people

What is suicide?

Suicide is when someone acts to take their own life. Sometimes when a person attempts suicide they do not succeed, but the act damages their body to the extent they will be unable to make a full recovery.

Suicide may feel like the only option for those who act to take their own lives or attempt to do so, but the aftermath can be incredibly traumatic for loved ones.

Attempted suicide is in fact much more common than you might think. Thousands of people are admitted to NHS emergency departments each year due to an attempt on their lives. Most people who attempt suicide survive, although a number of these will remain at high risk of suicide attempts for some time following the event. Any suicide attempt, however minor it may appear, should be taken seriously, as a number of young people will go on to take their own lives – about 1600 young people under the age of 35 will die through suicide each year in the UK.

What are suicidal thoughts?

Many young people will feel suicidal during their lives. Often it is a reaction to things going on in their lives or because they are depressed and feel hopeless. Some will end up in hospital due to self-harming or injuring behaviours, and many more will make suicide attempts that fail, but never tell anyone about it.

Painful emotions and events in their lives can begin to overwhelm young people, leading to desperation at the thought of carrying on and struggling through. They might consider the fact that they can make the choice to escape it all, questioning what would it be like if they weren't here anymore and didn't have to feel like this, ask themselves what would happen if they were dead?. These types of thoughts are very common, and don't always lead to actual suicide attempts or suicides. But they can become serious, especially in combination with depression, anxiety or other mental health issues. Decisions reached about attempting suicide when in these frames of minds can be impossible to come back from because they may not be thinking clearly (even if they think they are at the time).

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Some of the key warning signs to look out for when a young person is feeling suicidal are:

- Feeling overwhelming hopeless
- Feeling like no one could possibly understand or help
- Feeling agitated, moody and anxious
- Losing any interest in the things they once enjoyed doing
- Using self-harming and self-injuring techniques as coping strategies; taking risks with their personal safety
- Overwhelming and persistent thoughts of ending their lives
- Suicidal ideation – when they become fixated with thoughts of suicide and planning their own death
- Researching suicide methods
- Making plans to kill themselves
- Thinking about notes or messages they might like to leave behind for loved ones
- Getting their lives 'in order' – sorting through personal documents and emails and tying up loose strings with friends, perhaps going as far as planning final times they might see loved ones in their heads

Sometimes however, there is no “warning” that a suicide attempt is imminent until it occurs. Whilst it is often the case that those who have suicidal thoughts or make attempts are depressed and very sensitive, some young people can be in crisis yet appear outwardly confident and the “life and soul” of the party, keeping their plans completely secret to the outside world.

Why might do people become suicidal?

Suicidal thoughts and ideation can occur for several reasons:

- Being bullied
- Someone they love has died
- They've had a relationship breakdown
- Not getting exam results they hoped for and feeling like they've failed
- Being confused about their sexuality
- Being abused
- Shame at something they've done
- Feeling like they can't live up to expectations
- Problems at home such a divorce or witnessing domestic violence
- Suffering from depression
- Suffering with anxiety issues
- Having eating issues or disorders
- Feeling rejected by those they love
- Something physical is happening to affect their emotional state, such as illness, dependency on drugs/alcohol, medication causing side-effects or having an underactive pituitary gland
- Suffering other mental health issues such as bipolar disorder, schizophrenia and post-traumatic stress disorder
- Having lost a loved one to suicide
- Genetic factors giving them a higher risk of suicidal ideation and suicide attempts

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Ways of helping young people who are feeling suicidal or have made suicide attempts

Do:

- **Listen to them** - the most important thing you can do. Treat them with respect and dignity, and try not to be critical or judgemental of them or their actions; it is key to try to raise their self-esteem at this time
- **Reassure them** - make it clear that desperate feelings are very common and having them does not make them a hopeless person. Things can and do change, help can be found and hope always remains for the future
- **Remember that talking about suicide does not make it more likely to happen** - Don't be afraid to ask them how they are feeling, both before the ideation or attempt, and now
- **Try to be patient** – they may be angry and refuse to talk about it. If they won't talk to you, maybe encourage them talk to a trusted friend or sibling. Or, It may be that writing things down is an easier way for them to communicate their feelings
- **Show them empathy** – show them you care no matter what has happened, and are making a big effort to understand things from their point of view
- **Non-verbal communication can mean more than words** - The touch of your hand or a hug can go a long way to show that you care for them unconditionally
- **Practical support as well as emotional** - . It may not be possible to deal with all the things that are troubling them, but between you agree on what you will do if a suicidal crisis strikes again
- **If they are living away from home** - encourage them to come/go home for a visit, where possible arranging to collect them in person, or go to see them yourself. This will give you a truer perspective from which to assess the situation
- **Make it clear there are always other options** – they can leave or change courses at uni or college, resit exams, end bad relationships, and they have your full support in doing so

Don't:

- **Ignore what has happened** – you can't make it go away or pretend it hasn't happened. Denial will make things worse for all involved
- **Criticise them** - however you might feel about their suicide plan or attempt, try to put yourself in their shoes and remember the pain and turmoil that they were, and may still be, going through.
- **Take their behaviour personally or to heart** - it was probably not directed at you
- **Abandon or reject** - help, support and attention are important if they are to begin to feel that life is worth living again.
- **Be tempted to relax your attentions just because they seem to be better** - life is unlikely to be back to normal for them for a good while. They may remain at risk for quite some time
- **Put them down** – even if you are angry or it is unintentional. A suicide attempt, or serious thoughts of one, suggests that self-esteem is already very low.
- **Nag and pester** - although it may be well meant and you may be frustrated, it won't help them to feel under more pressure

Accessing outside help

- A GP or health professional should be the first port of call if a young person is feeling suicidal – they can refer them on to a psychiatrist, the local CAMHS/CMHT team and for talking therapies as appropriate. Offer to make an appointment for them and attend with them or arrange for someone else close to them to do so wherever possible
- Counselling services can be accessed through their GP, or via community organisations, school, college or university
- If they have made an attempt on their life or have presented as suicidal then they should be taken to the nearest A&E department for treatment – here they will be given a psychiatric assessment as well as medical intervention i

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- If after a suicide attempt or suicidal feelings things are getting not better, do not wait – contact a medical professional such as your GP or take them to A&E in the event of another crisis

How can No5 help?

Learning to effectively deal with the issues at the root of suicidal ideation and behaviours is important, as not dealt with it can cause us serious injury or death, so it is important to talk to somebody about it if things are becoming too much to handle. Here at No5 we offer free, impartial and confidential support to young people aged 10-25. Come and talk to us – counselling is about listening to, and helping YOU to work through your problems and find more effective ways of dealing with life's issues, in a caring, trusting environment.

Ways to contact us:

Counselling Phone: 0118 901 5668

Admin Phone: 0118 901 5649

E-mail: info@no5.org.uk

Address:

No5 Young People's Counselling and Information
2-4 Sackville Street
Reading, RG1 1NT

Social Media:

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/no5youngpeople>

Twitter: @no5youngpeople

Our Opening Hours are:

Monday	16:00 – 21:00
Tuesday	10:00 – 13:00 and 16:00 – 21:00
Wednesday	16:00 – 21:00
Thursday	16:00 – 21:00
Friday	16:00 – 21:00
Saturday & Sunday	Closed

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