



# Suicide: What to Do When Someone is Suicidal

When someone you know appears suicidal, you might not know what to do. Learn warning signs, what questions to ask and how to get help.

By Mayo Clinic Staff

Since 1980, Amanda the Panda has delivered love and caring through innovative services such as weekend grief camps, support groups, fun days, school visits and holiday support to inspire hope and healing after the death of a loved one. For more information, visit:

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When someone says he or she is thinking about suicide, or says things that sound as if the person is considering suicide, it can be very upsetting. You may not be sure what to do to help, whether you should take talk of suicide seriously, or if your intervention might make the situation worse. Taking action is always the best choice. Here's what to do.

## Start by asking questions

The first step is to find out whether the person is in danger of acting on suicidal feelings. Be sensitive, but ask direct questions, such as:

- How are you coping with what's been happening in your life?
- Do you ever feel like just giving up?
- Are you thinking about dying?
- Are you thinking about hurting yourself?
- Are you thinking about suicide?
- Have you ever thought about suicide before, or tried to harm yourself before?
- Have you thought about how or when you'd do it?
- Do you have access to weapons or things that can be used as weapons to harm yourself?

Asking about suicidal thoughts or feelings won't push someone into doing something self-destructive. In fact, offering an opportunity to talk about feelings may reduce the risk of acting on suicidal feelings.

## Look for warning signs

You can't always tell when a loved one or friend is considering suicide. But here are some common signs:

- Talking about suicide — for example, making statements such as "I'm going to kill myself," "I wish I were dead" or "I wish I hadn't been born"
- Getting the means to take your own life, such as buying a gun or stockpiling pills
- Withdrawing from social contact and wanting to be left alone
- Having mood swings, such as being emotionally high one day and deeply discouraged the next
- Being preoccupied with death, dying or violence
- Feeling trapped or hopeless about a situation
- Increasing use of alcohol or drugs
- Changing normal routine, including eating or sleeping patterns
- Doing risky or self-destructive things, such as using drugs or driving recklessly
- Giving away belongings or getting affairs in order when there is no other logical explanation for doing this
- Saying goodbye to people as if they won't be seen again
- Developing personality changes or being severely anxious or agitated, particularly when experiencing some of the warning signs listed above

## **For immediate help**

If someone has attempted suicide:

- Don't leave the person alone.
- Call 911 or your local emergency number right away. Or, if you think you can do so safely, take the person to the nearest hospital emergency room yourself.
- Try to find out if he or she is under the influence of alcohol or drugs or may have taken an overdose.
- Tell a family member or friend right away what's going on.

If a friend or loved one talks or behaves in a way that makes you believe he or she might attempt suicide, don't try to handle the situation alone:

- **Get help from a trained professional as quickly as possible.** The person may need to be hospitalized until the suicidal crisis has passed.
- **Encourage the person to call a suicide hotline number.** In the U.S., call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 800-273-TALK (800-273-8255) to reach a trained counselor. Use that same number and press "1" to reach the Veterans Crisis Line.