

Supporting a person in your community *who is suicidal*

Who is this information for?

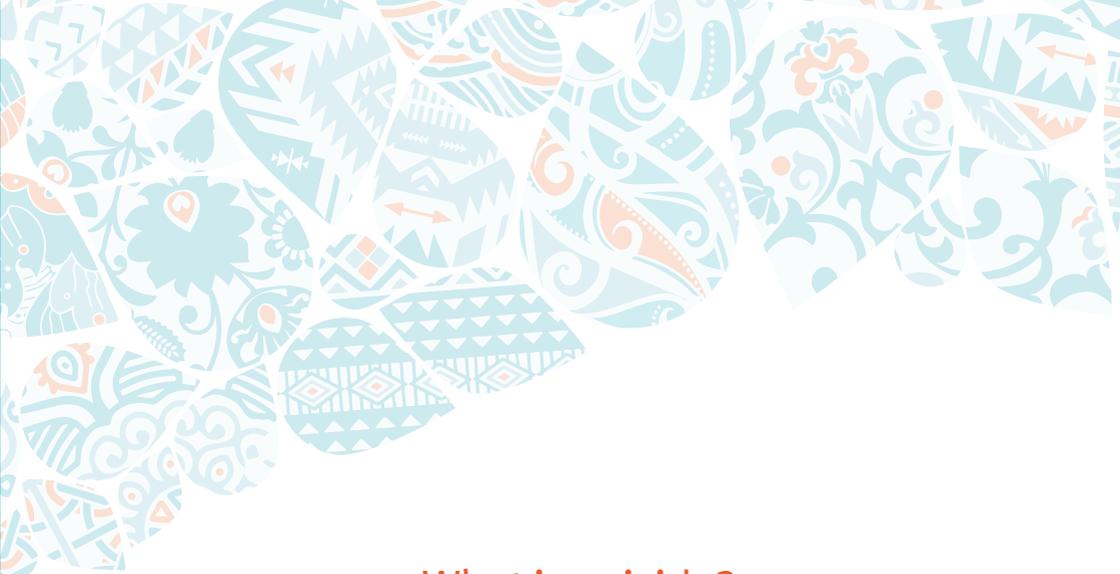
This booklet is to help you to:

- Recognise the signs of suicide; and
- Talk with someone you are worried about who may be thinking about suicide or showing signs of wanting to end their life.

Most of the time, people who think about suicide don't want to end their life, but they want the emotional pain (or the physical pain) to stop. Talking to someone about suicide is not easy. Knowing how to ask about suicide may help save someone's life.

By talking to the person, you can:

- Show a person that you care about them
- Give hope by reassuring a person that things will not stay this way, the crisis will pass, and that they can get help
- Support a person to seek help.



What is suicide?

Suicide is the intentional taking of one's own life.

Suicide is a complex issue. There is no one reason or explanation for suicide and many factors can play a role in increasing the possibility that someone may think about or plan to end their life.

Suicidal thoughts and behaviour can often be triggered by a loss or a painful life situation.



Some factors that may trigger or increase the risk of suicidal thoughts or behaviours

Social and cultural factors play a major role in increasing or decreasing the risk of suicide for individuals from culturally diverse communities.

Recognising that someone is going through a stressful or emotionally difficult time is an important first step in offering help. There are some situations that people from culturally diverse backgrounds may find more difficult or challenging to cope with such as:

- Family/marital difficulties, disagreements or loss (such as the death of or separation from someone dear to them)
- Pressures from family or community about lifestyle choice (for example, who they can marry or attendance at religious services)
- Major loss (for example, a financial loss, a loss of honour or a respected position in the family or community, loss of a job or a place to live)
- Rape, abortion or pregnancy outside of marriage
- Experiences of domestic and family violence
- Bullying and harassment
- Experiences of racism
- Reminders of previous trauma or torture
- Uncertain visa status
- Adjusting to living in a new country (understanding and dealing with cultural and social differences)
- Difficulties related to settling in a new country (such as learning a new language, getting a job, accessing services)
- A terminal illness or severe physical pain
- Chronic pain or disability
- Mental health condition.



Some warning signs that may lead to suicide



A person who has suicidal thoughts may not ask for help directly. If a person experiences or shows some of these signs, especially after a loss or a painful life situation, it may be time to ask them about suicide.

Some signs to look out for if the person:

- Talks or writes about wanting to die
- Talks about being a burden
- Talks about feeling hopeless or lonely
- Tries to get something that can cause death or could hurt them
- Loses interest in things they used to enjoy or withdraws from other people
- Shows noticeable changes in mood (such as increased sadness, anxiety or nervousness, unexplained sudden happiness after a long period of sadness)
- Shows changes to their sleeping and eating habits
- Has an increased use of alcohol, drugs, or medication
- Says goodbye or gives away important belongings
- Does unsafe or risky things that could endanger their life.
- Frequent and severe physical symptoms like headaches or stomach pains.

Important facts to know about suicide

 Common beliefs	 The facts
<i>Suicide is a criminal offence</i>	Suicide is not a crime in Australia
<i>Suicidal people want to die</i>	Research suggests that most people who are thinking about suicide or who have tried to end their life do not want to die. They want to end their emotional (or sometimes physical) pain
<i>If you ask a person directly about suicide this will put the idea in their head</i>	By asking about suicide you will NOT put the idea in their head. If a person is already thinking about suicide, asking the question shows that you care and may help a person to feel comfortable asking for help
<i>People who talk about suicide are attention seekers</i>	Research suggests that talking about suicide is usually a sign of distress. A person who is thinking about suicide may not have the skills or ability to ask for help
<i>People who talk about suicide usually do not mean to do it</i>	Talking about suicide is a warning sign and should be taken seriously
<i>All suicidal people have mental illness</i>	Not all suicidal people have mental illness. Social and cultural factors play a major role in suicidality for individuals from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
<i>Most suicides happen suddenly without warning signs</i>	Research suggests that most people who have tried to end their life show some warning signs
<i>Once someone is suicidal, they will always remain suicidal</i>	People with thoughts of suicide or who have tried to end their life can fully recover and develop healthier ways to cope with stressful events
<i>People who self-harm are not suicidal</i>	Self-harm behaviours are a risk factor for suicide and people who do so are more likely to try to end their life in the future. People who self-harm are expressing distress and should be encouraged to seek help



What can you do?

1. Ask questions
2. Listen and give support
3. Get help
4. Follow-up

If you are talking to someone from a culturally diverse background about suicide, it is important to be aware of, and sensitive to, the cultural and religious beliefs about suicide they may have.

If you are worried about someone having suicidal thoughts, follow the steps listed in the following pages.

For tips on how to talk about suicide view the Conversations Matter website at www.conversationsmatter.com.au

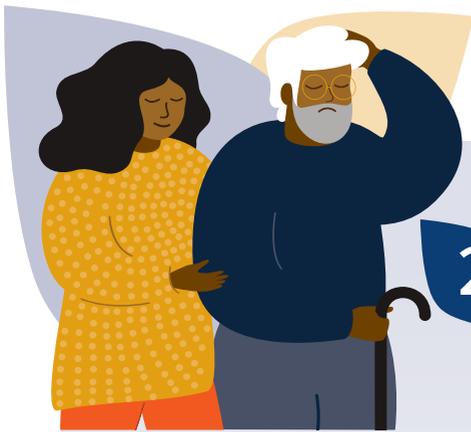


1. Ask questions

- **Let the person know you are worried about them.** Talk to them about the things you have noticed or what has made you worried. For example, “I’ve noticed some changes in you lately and I’m wondering how you are?”
- **Be direct.** “Are you having thoughts about suicide?” Don’t be afraid to ask, it shows that you care. Asking shows the person it is ok to talk about their suicidal thoughts with you. Your willingness to talk about their thoughts and feelings about wanting to end their life can help reduce stigma about suicide.
- **Be gentle.** Tell the person that other people who have gone through difficult times have also thought of suicide and have recovered. Remind them there is no shame in asking for help. Remember, your role as a family member, friend or a community member can be of great help and support to the person.
- **Ask more questions** to find out how urgent the situation is. Ask:
 - if the person has plans to die by suicide
“Have you made a plan to end your life?”
 - how long the person had thoughts of suicide
“How long have you had those feelings?”
 - if they have tried to end their life before
“Have you tried to end your life before?”
 - about their current situation and what is causing them distress
“Has something happened recently that has made you feel this way?”
 - if they know someone who has recently died by suicide
“Has someone in your community died by suicide or tried to end their life recently?”

If the person tells you that they are thinking of suicide, has a plan, or intends to end their life, please get them help by following the steps outlined in section **3. Get Help** (page 8).





2. Listen and give support

- **Listen with empathy.** Focus on what the person says, not on how you feel about what they are saying. Encourage them to open up by asking open-ended questions like “how do you feel now?”, “can you tell me about when you started feeling like this?”, “how are you sleeping?”
- **Be supportive.** Be supportive, even if what the person is saying is against your beliefs, you do not agree with the person’s choices, or you find it hard to understand why they are feeling this way. Don’t give advice or try to fix problems. The important thing is to keep the conversation going and to keep the person alive and safe. Listening is the best way to help the person feel comfortable to talk to you and open to asking for help.
- **Help them to share their thoughts, feelings and concerns.** You can encourage the person to talk more by repeating key things they have said and by expressing empathy. Some ways that you could do this are “So you said”, “You said you are worried about...”, “It sounds like you feel things are pretty bad for you at the moment”. Be ready to leave long spaces in the conversation to give the person time to gather their thoughts and respond to you. Consider the person’s body language and listen carefully to everything the person says.
- **Take what they say seriously.** If the person shares feelings of distress or thoughts of wanting to hurt themselves, it is important that you take what they say seriously and do your best to get them help as quickly as possible.



3. Get help

If you can do so safely, stay with the person. Check their safety, make sure there is nothing they can use to harm themselves. The information that you have learned from the person can help you to decide what to do next.

Suicide thoughts should not be kept a secret. This may mean telling health professionals so you can help the person to stay safe and to get help.

Encourage the person to get help and to seek support and information. Encourage the person to talk with people they know and trust. This could be members of their family, a trusted friend, community leader, school teacher, school guidance officer or others they feel comfortable with. If they would like and you are comfortable, you could offer to help them talk with this trusted individual.

For urgent situations:

1. *Where there is immediate danger or risk of suicide*

- Call Emergency on **000**; or
- take them straight to a hospital emergency department; or
- if the person can get in immediately, see a GP or psychologist

2. *If you are not sure if the person is at risk of suicide, you can call these services for help and advice*

- 1300 MH Call **1300 642 255** (*mental health services*)
- Suicide Call Back Service **1300 659 467**
- Lifeline **13 11 14**
- Kids Helpline **1800 55 1800**
- BeyondBlue **1300 224 636**



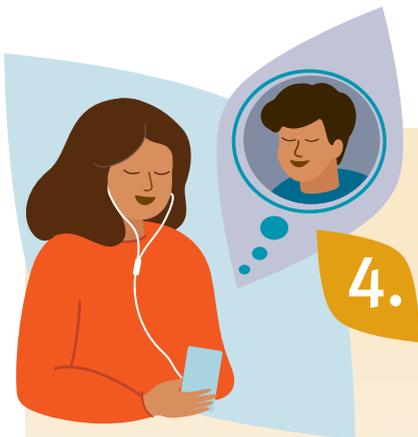
For non-urgent phone support (24 hours/7 days a week):

- 1300 MH Call.....1300 642 255 (*mental health services*)
- Suicide Call Back Service.....1300 659 467
- Lifeline13 11 14
- Kids Helpline.....1800 55 1800
- BeyondBlue.....1300 224 636

For non-urgent and specialised multicultural services:

- **General Practitioner or family doctor**
- **Queensland Transcultural Mental Health Centre**
Monday to Friday 8:30am to 4:30pm: (07) 3317 1234 or
1800 188 189 (toll free)
www.metrosouth.health.qld.gov.au/qtmhc
– a state-wide intake service to link people to relevant mental health services
- **Queensland Program of Assistance to Survivors of Torture and Trauma**
(07) 3391 6677 – for trauma counselling
- **World Wellness Group** (07) 3333 2100 – accepts suicide prevention referrals
under their Multicultural Psychological Therapies Program or provides psycho-social support under their Culture in Mind Program
- **Harmony Place** 0432 494 206 – for psycho-social support

If you need a phone interpreter call TIS on 131 450



4. Follow-up

- **Show that you care** by checking on the person often and asking them how they are. You can do this face to face, phone, text or email. Showing a person that you are thinking about them can make a difference.
- **If the person is linked to a support service**, ask for permission to communicate your concerns with that service.
- **You don't have to take responsibility by yourself**. Use your own support network and know when and where to ask for help.
- **Talking to someone who is suicidal can be stressful**, so take care of yourself. Practice healthy habits and seek support for yourself too when feeling stressed or upset.



Contact us

Queensland Transcultural Mental Health Centre (QTMHC)

Metro South Addiction and Mental Health Service

Metro South Health

Phone: (07) 3317 1234

Toll free: 1800 188 189

MH Call: 1300 64 22 55 (24hrs)

Fax: (07) 3317 1299

Web: www.metrosouth.health.qld.gov.au/qtmhc

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Commission**



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