



HAVING

SUICIDAL THOUGHTS

Explains what suicidal thoughts are, possible reasons people have suicidal thoughts, how to cope with suicidal thoughts in the future and how to manage if feeling suicidal now. Apps and websites for more support are also provided.

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What are suicidal thoughts?

Suicide is the act of taking your own life. Suicidal thoughts or suicide ideation refers to thinking about or planning suicide.

Having suicidal thoughts can range from having fleeting considerations of taking your own life, intense feelings about taking your own life and creating a plan to take your own life. These feelings can be very overwhelming and may cause you to feel scared and sometimes confused.

Many people can suffer from feeling suicidal especially in times of great stress or despair. Thoughts and feelings can vary from person to person. Below are some examples of how you might be thinking if you are suffering from suicidal thoughts and what you also might be experiencing.

What you might be thinking?

- Useless, feeling like you are not needed, can't do anything right
- Hopeless, like there is no point in carrying on
- Disposable, like no one needs you around, in some cases that everyone would be better off without you
- Numbness, feeling like you aren't really there or that you are watching yourself from outside of your body
- Desperate, you may feel like this is your only option
- Overwhelmed and despairing over having negative thoughts

Its important to know that you are not alone. Many people feel suicidal at some time during their lives.

If you aren't sure if you are having suicidal thoughts here are some warning signs:

- Fascination with death- always researching/thinking about it
- Deep sadness or depression
- Loss of interest in day-to-day life
- Trouble with sleep and eating
- Self-harm urges and/or actions
- Feeling angry at who you are or the world
- Neglecting taking care of yourself
- Wanting to avoid others

Why am I experiencing suicidal thoughts?

Having suicidal thoughts can happen for a number of reasons or contributions. Often people struggle with suicidal thoughts when they've been under extreme stress or distress and in general just struggling to cope with the difficulties in your life. While there are no rules or checklists for explaining why you might be having suicidal thoughts below are some common difficulties that may cause you to be feeling suicidal:

- An existing mental health problem, e.g., suffering from severe depression or PTSD.
- Having had an attempted suicide experience in the past.
- Having a chronic health problem e.g., cancer, and/or terminal disease.
- Suffering from chronic pain
- Experienced childhood trauma or abuse
- Housing problems, including homelessness.
- The end of a relationship
- Loss of a job
- Money problems
- Isolation or intense loneliness
- Addiction or substance abuse
- Feeling inadequate/a failure
- Difficulties in dealing with sexual orientation or gender identity
- Family changes/disruption such as divorce, siblings leaving, moving to a new town.
- Bullying
- Issues in school, struggling with academic pressure
- Exposure to suicidal behaviours either from someone you know, online or in the news.

How can I manage suicidal thoughts?

If you are struggling with fleeting thoughts and want to be able to cope with them when they come then below are some ideas of things you can do. These steps are also just good for maintaining your general wellbeing when you are feeling low or struggling with just negative thoughts (see our booklet on low mood for more information on this).

1. Create a safety plan

This is a way to help to have access to the things you need and reminders for when you are feeling suicidal. This plan is personal to you but it's good to include highlighting you're warning signs, coping strategies that have worked in the past, names of people that you can talk to, helpline numbers or numbers of professionals that you can call, details of a safe location you can go to. It might be a good idea to create this plan with someone you trust, this can be a friend, family member, teacher or professional. Below is an example of a blank safety plan that we give to our young people.

What I need to do to reduce the risk of me acting on the suicidal thoughts
What warning signs or triggers are there that make me feel more out of control?
What have I done in the past that helped? What ways of coping do I have?
What I will do to help calm and soothe myself.
What I will tell myself (as alternatives to the dark thoughts)
What would I say to a close friend who was feeling this way?
What could others do that would help?
Who can I call: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Friend or relative:• Health professional:• Telephone Helpline:
A safe place I can go to
If I shall feel suicidal and out of control: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• I will go to the A&E department• If I can't get there safely, I will call 999 (112, 911 etc)

2. Make a self-soothe box

If you often have repeated feelings of low mood a self-soothe or mood box is a great way to manage those feelings and help you feel more relaxed. It's something you can get out and focus on when you're feeling low.

Each self-soothe box can be different and filled with things that are relevant to the individual and make you feel more positive. Some ideas of where to start are to focus on having a range of sensory things in the box to enable you to focus your mind on. You could include something you like the smell of or a smell that is calming, a popular choice is lavender. Something you could touch, examples could either be something soft and soothing to feel comforted or something to use for stress relief like a stress ball. Something you can look at this could be a photograph, an old toy a book or poem something that brings you joy and makes you feel calm and so on. Something to hear could be a favourite CD or DVD.

The things that go into the box must help to change your mood when you are feeling low, tense, or overwhelmed.

3. Keep a diary

Keeping a diary can help you keep track of your feelings and specifically any changes in your mood you might have noticed. It can help you to learn your triggers for feeling suicidal. It can also be helpful to jot down any reasons you might think are making you suicidal as well as any negative thoughts or feelings you are feeling. It may also help you recognise certain activities, places, or people that make you feel better or worse.

4. Look after your physical health

A poor diet, lack of exercise and sleep can affect your mood and make it harder for you to be able to deal with stressful life events so it's important to look after yourself.

Try to get good sleep: Sleeping too much or too little can be common when you're feeling low. Getting into a good sleeping pattern can help improve your mood by increasing your energy levels. See our booklet on sleep for tips.

Sticking to a healthy diet: Eating regularly and keeping your sugar levels stable will make a difference to your mood. If you are experiencing some problems with food see our booklet on Food issues for help with this. It's also important to avoid recreational drugs and alcohol, although you may lean towards these to cope with difficult feelings, in the long run they can make your low periods worse and/or last longer.

Try and do something active: Exercise is a great way to increase your endorphins and improve your mood. This doesn't have to be strenuous activity, you could try walking, running, swimming or yoga something gentler could still give you a boost to your mood.



5. Increase your value

There are different ways this can be done.

Write a letter to yourself: this can include happy memories from past experiences, and you can include loved ones who care for you. You can read this letter when you are feeling suicidal to remind yourself of happier times and good people.

Make plans: sometimes when feeling suicidal it can feel like you have nothing to live for. Making plans to do something you look forward to can make you feel more positive about the future. This could be a holiday, social engagement, concert anything that you enjoy.

Celebrate yourself: this can be a great way to increase your self-esteem. Write down your achievements, things you like about yourself, things you're good at etc...

6. Seek support

If you have people that you have spoken to about your feelings in the past and have been supportive then reach out to them if you can. Tell people only what you find helpful for them to know about you feeling suicidal. If you feel you don't have anyone you can go to then try a helpline or professional confidential organisation- there are some listed below in our useful resources. Try peer support, it might be useful for you to talk to someone who has gone through the same feelings. This might be someone you know or you can go through organisations and access peer support through them you can share experiences and maybe learn some new coping ideas- only do this if you feel safe to do so and if it won't be triggering for you.

How can I cope if feeling suicidal right now?

If you are in crisis and feel unable to keep yourself safe then please get emergency help. If you have made an attempt get to A&E or if you can't get there safely call 999

It's important to remember the things you've come up with to do as a precaution, you're coping and managing techniques. But there's a couple of extra things you can do if you are feeling suicidal right now.

Get yourself safe

- Remove anything that you could use to harm yourself or get yourself away from them and get to a safe location.
- Take it minute by minute. Tell yourself to get through the next 5 minutes. Sometimes breaking down the time can make it more manageable. Reward/congratulate yourself for each 5-minute period you get through.
- Get out your safety plan and follow what you wrote step by step.
- Reach out to someone.

Distract yourself from your thoughts

If you are thinking of harming yourself, use some self-harm techniques and distractions if you need some help with this, take a look at our pages on self-harm but some quick examples could be:

- Tearing something up/breaking things apart e.g., tearing paper, knocking over Lego
- Hold an ice cube against where you normally self-harm e.g., on your wrist, thigh, upper arm.

If you feel up to it try and get yourself to do an activity that will keep you distracted this can be something small like listening to music or putting the tv on or you can go for a walk/run and get yourself outside- feeling the change in temperature, a breeze or the warmth from the sun can help if you are feeling numb.



Practise self-care

Taking time out to look after yourself, by just doing something you enjoy/makes you feel good can help improve your mood and your quality of life. Self-care is really personal but some ideas of things you could do when feeling low are:

1. Listen to your favourite song
2. Paint or draw
3. Comfort food
4. Make your bed, fresh sheets
5. Get creative, make something
6. Take a long shower/bath
7. Write out your thoughts

Challenge your thoughts

Having suicidal thoughts can be very overwhelming and hard to distract yourself from but it is important to try. One way to do this is to list either physically or in your head your reasons to live. These can be things you are looking forward to big or small, make some plans for something to do later on, later on can be the same day or later on in the week. Think about the people you care about, and how these people would miss you when you're gone.

Encourage yourself, tell yourself that you can get through this. If you suffer from regular fleeting thoughts remind yourself that these thoughts don't last, and you have gotten through them before.

You can also try talking to yourself as if you are talking to a friend, and what you would say to them if they were feeling this way. Try and be kind to yourself, treat yourself e.g., stop working and cosy up or run yourself a nice bath.



Use breathing exercises

This can help you focus on your now and your surrounds and try and keep you calm, especially if you have started to feel panicked by your suicidal thoughts. To focus on your breathing try a relaxation breathing exercise and to focus on your senses try the grounding five senses technique:

4-7-8 Breathing

1. Close your mouth and inhale quietly through your nose to a mental count of four.
2. Hold your **breath** for a count of seven.
3. Exhale completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound to a count of eight.
4. Now inhale again and repeat the cycle three more times for a total of four **breaths**.

The 5-4-3-2-1 grounding Technique

Take a deep breath and...

1. Acknowledge **five things** that you can **see around you**.
2. Acknowledge **four things** that you can **touch around you**.
3. Acknowledge **three things** you can **hear around you**.
4. Acknowledge **two things** around you **that you can smell**.
5. Acknowledge **one thing** around you **that you can taste**.

Useful resources and links

Websites:

Childline: If you're under 19 you can confidentially call, chat online or email about any problem big or small. <https://www.childline.org.uk/>

Campaign Against Living Miserably (CALM): 0800 58 58 58 (UK helpline) 0808 802 58 58 (London helpline) thecalmzone.net Provides listening services, information and support for men at risk of suicide, including a web chat.

The Mix: 0808 808 4994 85258 (crisis messenger service, text THEMIX) themix.org.uk Support and advice for under 25s, including a helpline, crisis messenger service and webchat

Papyrus: HOPELINEUK 0800 068 41 41 07786 209697 (text) papyrus-uk.org Confidential support for under-35s at risk of suicide and others who are concerned about them.

Sane: sane.org.uk Offers emotional support and information for anyone affected by mental health problems.

Samaritans: 116 123 (freephone) Support helpline for anyone feeling suicidal. Open 24/7.

Shout 85258 (text SHOUT) giveusashout.org Confidential 24/7 text service offering support if you are in crisis and need immediate help.

Students Against Depression: studentsagainstdepression.org Information and support for students experiencing suicidal feelings, including a helpful safety plan template.

YoungMinds: Useful information and resources for a range of mental health problems as well as suicide for young people. <https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/feelings-and-symptoms/suicidal-feelings>