

# Suicide Risk Factors & Warning Signs



## 5 Effective “How To” Strategies

### #1 "Ask"



#BeThe1To  
**ASK.**

Find out why this can save a life at  
**[www.BeThe1To.com](http://www.BeThe1To.com)**

If you're struggling, call the Lifeline at  
**1-800-273-TALK (8255)**

There are a number of incorrect assumptions about openly asking someone if they are thinking about suicide. Some of the common misconceptions have to do with a fear of planting a seed in someone's mind about suicide. This is far from the truth. And that is why the very first thing you can do to help someone is to ask. Asking the question "Are you thinking about suicide?" communicates that you're open to speaking about suicide in a non-judgmental and supportive way. Asking in this direct, unbiased manner, can

open the door for effective dialogue about their emotional pain and can allow everyone involved to see what next steps need to be taken. Other questions you can ask might include, “How do you hurt?” and “How can I help?”

An important point to make here is that you should **never promise to keep their thoughts of suicide a secret. This doesn't allow them to access the help they truly need and ends up putting much of the burden on yourself, which is also not healthy for you.** Now the flip side of the “Ask” step is to “Listen.” Make sure you take their answers seriously and don't ignore them, especially if they indicate they are experiencing thoughts of suicide. Listening to their reasons for being in such emotional pain, as well as listening for any potential reasons they want to continue to stay alive, are both incredibly important when they are telling you what's going on. **Help them focus on THEIR reasons for living and avoid trying to impose YOUR reasons for them to stay alive.**

Studies have shown that asking at-risk individuals if they are suicidal does not increase suicides or suicidal thoughts. In fact, studies suggest the exact opposite. Findings suggest acknowledging and talking about suicide may in fact reduce rather than increase suicidal ideation.

## #2 "Keep Them Safe"



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The second thing you can do is ensuring you're keeping them safe. First of all, it's good for everyone to be on the same page. After the "Ask" step, and you've determined suicide is indeed being talked about, it's important to find out a few things to establish immediate safety:

- **Have they already done anything to try to kill themselves before talking with you?**
- **Does the person experiencing thoughts of suicide know how they would kill themselves?**
- **Do they have a specific, detailed plan?**
- **What's the timing for their plan?**
- **What sort of access to do they have to their planned method?**

Knowing the answers to each of these questions can tell us a lot about the imminence and severity of danger the person is in. For instance, the more steps and pieces of a plan that are in place, the higher their severity of risk and their capability to enact their plan might be. Or if they have immediate access to a firearm and are very serious about attempting suicide, then extra steps (like calling the authorities or driving them to an emergency room) might be necessary. The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline can always act as a resource during these moments as well if you aren't entirely sure what to do next. I'll provide that information here in just a bit. But regarding this idea of keeping them safe, the [Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health](#) notes that "reducing a suicidal person's access to highly lethal means (or chosen method for a suicide attempt) is an important part of suicide prevention. A number of studies have indicated that when lethal means are made less available or less deadly, suicide rates by that method decline, and frequently suicide rates overall decline. Research also shows that "method substitution" or choosing an alternate method when the original method is restricted, frequently does not happen. **The myth "If someone really wants to kill themselves, they'll find a way to do it" often does NOT hold true if appropriate safety measures are put into place.** The Keep Them Safe step is really about showing support for someone during the times when they have thoughts of suicide by **putting time and distance between the person and their chosen method, especially methods that have shown higher lethality (like firearms and medications).**



### #3 "Be There"

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The 3rd thing you can do is to simply, be there. This could mean:

- **being physically present for someone,**
- **speaking with them on the phone when you can, or**
- **any other way that shows support for the person at risk.**

An important aspect of this step is to make sure you follow through with the ways in which you say you'll be able to support the person – **do not commit to anything you are not willing or able to accomplish.** If you are unable to be physically present with someone with thoughts of suicide, talk with them to develop some ideas for others who might be able to help as well (again, only others who are willing, able, and appropriate to be there).

Listening is again very important during this step – find out what and who they believe will be the most effective sources of help. Being there for someone with thoughts of suicide is life-saving. Increasing someone’s connectedness to others and limiting their isolation (both in the short and long-term) has shown to be a protective factor against suicide. Studies show that connectedness is one of suicide’s main components – specifically, a low sense of belonging. When someone experiences this state, paired with perceived burdensomeness (arguably tied to “connectedness” through isolating behaviors and lack of a sense of purpose) and acquired capability (a lowered fear of death and habituated experiences of violence), their risk can become severely elevated.

Connectedness is a key protective factor, not only against suicide as a whole, but in terms of the escalation of thoughts of suicide to action. Research has also shown that connectedness acts as a buffer against hopelessness and psychological pain. **By “being there,” we have a chance to alleviate or eliminate some of these significant factors.**

## #4 "Help Them Connect"



The 4th thing you can do is to help them connect. Be willing to help someone with thoughts of suicide connect with ongoing supports (like the Lifeline) can help them establish a safety net for those moments they find themselves in a crisis. Additional components of a safety net might be connecting them with supports and resources in their communities. Explore some of these possible supports with them:

- **Are they currently seeing a mental health professional?**
- **Have they in the past?**
- **Is this an option for them currently?**
- **Are there other mental health resources in the community that can effectively help?**
- **Are there any programs offered through your employer that could help get them on this path**

One way to start helping them find ways to connect is to work with them to develop a safety plan. This can include ways for them identify if they start to experience significant, severe thoughts of suicide along with what to do in those crisis moments. A safety plan can also include a list of individuals to contact when a crisis occurs.



# MY3 FEATURES



## Create your support system.

Add the contact information of the 3 people you feel you would like to talk to when you are having thoughts of suicide.



## Build your safety plan.

Customize your safety plan by identifying your personal warning signs, coping strategies, distractions and personal networks. This safety plan will be with you at all times and can help you stay safe when you start thinking about suicide. Learn more about [safety planning](#).



## Access Important Resources.

Hold all your resources in the palm of your hand. Whether you're a veteran, want support from your local community, or want to learn more about suicide prevention, pick the resources that best support you.



## Get support at times of greatest risk.

When you're having thoughts of suicide and it feels like there's no hope in sight, find support at your fingertips at any time of the day.



## Access the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 24/7.

A trained counselor from a crisis center near you can be reached 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Anyone can call, whether you're concerned for yourself or someone else. If you need someone to talk to, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is always ready for the call.



**The MY3 App** is a safety planning and crisis intervention app that can help develop these supports and is stored conveniently on your smartphone for quick access. Studies show that the impact of applied suicide intervention skills training on the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline found that **individuals that called the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline were significantly more likely to feel less depressed, less suicidal, less overwhelmed, and more hopeful by the end of calls handled by Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training-trained counselors.** These improvements were linked to ASIST-related counselor interventions, including listening without judgment, exploring reasons for living and creating a network of support. All very powerful tools to link your co-workers or loved ones up with if they need help.

## #5 "Follow Up"



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The 5th and final thing you can do after your initial contact with a person experiencing thoughts of suicide, and after you've connected them with the immediate support systems they need, is to make sure you follow-up with them to see how they're doing. **Leave a message, send a text, or give them a call.**

The follow-up step is a great time to check in with them to see if there is more you are capable of helping with or if there are things you've said you would do and haven't yet had the chance to get done for them. **This type of contact can continue to increase their feelings of connectedness and share your ongoing support.**




There is evidence that even a simple form of reaching out, like sending a kind text or a letter can potentially reduce their risk for suicide. Studies have shown a reduction in the number of deaths by suicide when following up was involved with high risk populations after they were discharged from acute care services. Studies have also shown that brief, low cost intervention and supportive, ongoing contact may be an important part of suicide prevention. So what I'm asking you to do, is think about what you would want if you were struggling with these thoughts and reach out in a way you yourself would appreciate.

**I can't help but feel a strong sense of hope from what will come about as a result of this awareness training. And that has ZERO to do with me and everything to do with what I believe each of you will do as a result of watching this and focusing in on prevention opportunities for both yourself and your co-workers.**

You have to realize the amazing blessing it is to impact someone's life for good. And if you're the one needing that blessing, I'm gonna encourage you to allow yourself to receive it. As I said in the beginning, and it's something that can't be said enough, you're worth the investment and you're never too far gone. You have value and you're loved, whether you can see it right now or not. So cling to that truth, and those of you watching, seek to help others cling to that same truth. I also need you to realize that you're not alone in this.

1-800-273-8255 CHAT  
En Español | For Deaf & Hard of Hearing

## Talk To Someone Now

SHARE   

If you're thinking about suicide, are worried about a friend or loved one, or would like emotional support, the Lifeline network is available 24/7 across the United States.

### Directory

The Lifeline is available for everyone, is free, and confidential. See below for additional crisis services and hotlines.

- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline**  
1-800-273-8255  
CHAT WITH LIFELINE
- Nacional de Prevención del Suicidio**  
1-888-628-9454
- Options For Deaf + Hard of Hearing**  
1-800-799-4889
- Veterans Crisis Line**  
1-800-273-8255  
Text 838255  
CHAT WITH VCL
- Disaster Distress Helpline**  
1-800-985-5990  
Text TalkWithUs to 66746

Talk To Someone Now  
Directory  
What Happens When I Call The Lifeline?  
Should I Call The Lifeline?

There are amazing groups out there with trained staff to help you or a co-worker in a time of need. Please reach out to the **National Suicide Prevention Hotline at 1-800-273-8255**. You can also get on their website for some amazing stories of survival. They also have a chat line if you feel more comfortable messaging a trained professional. Either way, use these resources as you need to. We all need help from time to time and you're worth the investment.