

# Helping Someone in Suicidal Crisis

## *Quick Reference Guide*

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A suicidal crisis is very difficult to deal with. It is usually unanticipated and requires the helper to mobilize a variety of skills and resources. Following is a list of suggestions should you face the challenge of preventing a suicide attempt.

### DO:

- **Always take suicidal comments very seriously.** When a person says that he or she is thinking about suicide, you must always take the comments as being real. Assuming that the person is only seeking attention is a very grave and potentially dangerous error.
- **Encourage the person to discuss what prompted the suicidal thoughts and ideas.** The more the person is able to talk about the specific details of the experience, the better he or she is able to understand the source of the crisis. Listen attentively to everything the person has to say.
- **Use the term “kill yourself” when talking about the threat.** Oftentimes, people contemplating suicide envision the process from a distorted perspective. It may be seen as a “romanticized” escape, a solution without notable consequences. Using this term can bring the person into a sharper reality focus while enabling the helper to determine if a plan is in place.
- **Elicit the person’s feelings.** Expressing emotions is a way for the person to vent frustrations while securing validation and support. Example: “How did you feel when that happened?” Allow the person to cry, yell, swear, and do what is necessary to release the emotion; however, do not allow the person to become violent or harm him/herself.
- **Assist the person in defining alternatives and options.** Those who are contemplating death do not see life as having positive alternative solutions. With assistance, the person in crisis can have the option to select the best solution for the situation.
- **Seek professional help as needed.** If you feel that the person is in immediate danger get help immediately by calling 9-1-1 or 1-800-273-TALK. Trained professionals can assist the person in crisis to deal more effectively with the problem and work to instill hope again. The challenge may be cultivating a sense of trust to include an outside person.
- **If the person is at high risk of suicide, do not leave him/her alone.** Only after you get professional help should you consider leaving them.
- **After the person had received help and is no longer critically suicidal, help the person make an appointment with a medical doctor and therapist.** Suicidal feelings need to be dealt with on a professional level. Only trained professionals should assume the care for the person. Do not try and care for the person by yourself.
- **Follow-up with the person on a regular basis to make sure that he or she is doing okay.** Suicidal feelings can come and go, so follow-up to see how the person is.

### DON'T:

- **Do not act shocked.** The person is already highly distressed and if you are shocked by what is said, the person will become more distressed. Stay calm, and talk with him or her in a matter-of-fact manner.
- **Don't be judgmental.** Do not invalidate anything that the person says or feels.
- **Do not handle the situation by yourself.** A suicidal person needs immediate assistance from qualified mental health professionals.
- **Never tell someone that you will keep their suicidal intentions a secret.** In many cases, the suicidal person wants the helper to maintain confidentiality. It is important to emphasize the he or she came to you because of trust and confidence that you care to do the right thing. Encourage the person in crisis to value your decision to involve a professional counselor if needed. Under no circumstances should you keep a “secret” involving a life or death matter. You are not violating a privileged communication; you are taking the necessary steps to save a life.

Sources: The University of Florida Counseling Center and [www.suicide.org](http://www.suicide.org).