

HOW TO HELP A FRIEND



**MEN'S
MINOS
MATTER**

Worried about a guy?

If you're concerned that someone you care about is struggling, the best thing to do is reach out. Below are ways to approach these difficult conversations.

Let's be honest, suicide can be an uncomfortable topic to talk about. That's often why people who are struggling don't ask for help. Whether it's a fear of rejection, stigma, feeling a burden, or being seen as less of a man somehow, these worries can all mean someone stays silent. They may try to soldier on and put on a brave face when inside they're

suffering and may not even register how bad things are.

Suicide is preventable and there are some things we can all do to help someone who is suicidal. Offering support and understanding can have a massive impact on a guy struggling to cope.



Suicide is preventable

Who is at risk of suicide?

There's no one reason people end their own lives and under the certain conditions it can happen to anyone. Men are at higher risk of suicide and societal pressure to be tough and independent may discourage guys from seeking help during life's low points.

Other things can increase that risk, like substance abuse, a history of trauma and abuse, isolation, poverty, imprisonment, family or relationship breakdown, mental or physical health issues, and problems with work or money.

Often, people consider ending their life to escape what feels like an impossible situation. They may have searched for a solution to their problem and not been able to find one, leading them to believe that things will never get better and that nothing will help.

Someone may feel that they've let themselves or others down and

can't seem to find the point in living anymore. When the walls feel like they're closing in, suicide can feel like the only way out. This feeling of being trapped with unmanageable thoughts and feelings can make suicide feel like a way to take back control of an uncontrollable situation. Suicide can feel like it provides a way out in the absence of knowing any other alternative.

It's important to realise that there are different reasons and feelings involved for everyone. Types of suicidal thoughts vary between people and over time, both in terms of how intense they are and how long they last.

This means there's no blueprint for understanding what someone's going through and it's important to hear their unique story. However, there are things that seem to be common experiences for people who are suicidal. Knowing what these are and how to respond to them can help you to help someone else.

Choose to help

If you're worried that a guy you know isn't OK, it can be tough to know if and how to bring it up with them. But it's almost always better to speak up than stay silent. If you're worried about upsetting them, that's understandable. But remember, by bringing it up you may help to save their life.

There are certain signs to look out for and ways to approach the conversation. Familiarise yourself with the information below so that you feel empowered to help.

Reach out
if you notice
a change

LOOK OUT FOR SIGNS and trust your gut if something feels off

Everyone goes through tough times, whether it's a break-up, losing a job, a stressful time at work or home, or feeling like a failure. These are also situations that can trigger suicidal thoughts or impact someone's ability to cope.

When someone is struggling it could be linked to a single big event that has negatively affected them, or it could be a series of smaller things that build up over time. Either way, people respond differently and it's worth keeping an eye on a mate going through

a stressful time, or someone who seems more down than usual.

Sometimes there are warning signs and other times there aren't. Changes in behaviour might include unexpected mood changes, withdrawing socially, changes in sleep and eating, not having energy, feeling agitated and angry, self-neglect, risk-taking behaviour like drinking and taking drugs, and bringing up suicide or wanting to die, even as a joke.

Often, if you think something is off, it probably is - trust your gut.

Prepare for the conversation

Think ahead about what to say and what might happen next. For example, do you have time in case you need to stay with them? Do you have details of organisations or resources you could signpost to that might help? There's more information on all of this below, but the most important thing is to feel prepared and calm going into the conversation.

Choose somewhere private, quiet and where the person feels comfortable. You don't want to be interrupted and you want to have enough time to talk about what might come up. Avoid meeting in the pub or discussing these things over a beer - your effort to help will be diluted because alcohol impairs our ability to cope emotionally and recall the conversation!

Be kind to yourself too. You're not an expert and you don't need to have all the answers. The most

important thing is to know that listening and asking the question is the first step towards finding a solution.

You might not have answers but there are people out there who do know solutions your friend isn't yet aware of.

Listen and signpost

Suicide isn't a dirty word

Be direct

The best approach is being sensitive and direct. Let them know that you've noticed a change in them and that you're concerned.

Suicide isn't a dirty word. Asking someone if they are feeling suicidal can be scary, but avoiding the word and skirting around the issue makes it harder for someone to open up and can add to the stigma attached to suicide.

Asking direct questions encourages people to be honest and research shows that speaking openly about suicide decreases the risk of someone acting on their feelings.

Direct questions include things like "are you feeling suicidal?", or "have you thought about ending your life?".

If you're afraid that this might put the idea in someone's head, it won't. If someone is feeling suicidal, it's probably already in their head and it will probably be a big relief to be able to acknowledge how they are feeling.

If they're not feeling suicidal, you're allowed to feel awkward for a moment then move on. Keep in mind also that it may be they are struggling in some other way and your interest opens a door to have a conversation about other potential struggles. Whatever happens, they'll probably be grateful you're looking out for them. These types of conversation deepen connections and strengthen relationships.

Listen and encourage them to open up

Remember, you don't need to be an expert to help someone feeling suicidal, and you don't need to present a solution. In fact, you often don't need to say a lot. Listening and helping someone to work through what's going on in their head can be enough to save a life.

- **Keep your phone away**, make eye contact and focus on what someone is saying. This shows you care and are giving them your attention.
- **Be patient**, it may take a while for someone to open up. If they pause while they're talking, don't try to fill the silence. Often someone is formulating what they want to say in their head and may have more to share.

You could count to 5 in your head to make sure you've given them enough time.

- **Use open questions** that don't have 'yes'/'no' answers, like "how does that make you feel?", and follow-up with questions like "tell me more". This stops you jumping in with your own ideas or viewpoints and gives people an opportunity to think and reflect. It also helps them

feel they can open up without being judged. Avoid shutting down the conversation by saying things like "try not to worry about it" or "stay positive".

- **Repeat back what you've heard** to help make someone feel listened and paid attention to. This also works as a way to check that what you're hearing is what they mean.
- **Take them seriously** and don't deny what they're saying. People do act on suicidal feelings sometimes, so it's important to take them seriously when they open up about struggling to cope. Don't try to convince them of how lucky they are, or leave them feeling guilty about wanting to end their life or the people they'd leave behind.
- **Stay calm** and encourage them to talk the situation through. Try not to overreact or become upset if you can help it. Even though it might be upsetting to hear someone is feeling suicidal,

staying calm helps them feel calmer too. Suicidal thoughts are common but suicide less so.

- **Avoid making assumptions** about what may have caused their feelings or what will help. Try not to judge, criticize or blame them for any feelings or behaviours. They have taken a big step by telling you, so just listen and be there for them.
- **Reassure them** that they can share what they're going through with you, and that you believe them and want to be there for them. You don't need to solve their problems right now. What you can say is that these feelings won't last forever, they will pass and that there is help available.
- **Don't panic about saying the wrong thing**. You can always follow up to apologise if you felt that something you said was insensitive and to remind them that you're still there for them.

Take action

If someone tells you they are suicidal and have made plans or intend to kill themselves, don't leave them alone. Stay with them and say that you want to get professional help. You can call their GP, or in an immediate emergency get to a place of safety. At the moment this would be the local Accident and Emergency, where they can access local mental health crisis services. You could also check to see if you can access your local crisis resolution home treatment team directly but this is less common.

If someone has said they're struggling but is not intending to act on their suicidal thoughts, still encourage them to take action.

Ask what has helped them before or find out more about what might improve their situation. You could work with them to make a safety plan listing what they can do to take care of themselves, how they would like to be supported, and who can be contacted in an emergency.

You could try setting some simple goals together, or make plans to meet up again soon. It can also help to encourage them to speak to other people in their life they trust.

Check if they know where to get support by asking things like "have you talked to anyone else about this?", "would you like to get some help?", "do you have someone you trust you can go to?". It can be really helpful to signpost services designed to help people who are struggling to cope.

Get support and know your limits

You don't need to approach this alone. Think about involving family, mates or colleagues who may also be able to offer support. This needs to be with the consent of your friend.

There are lots of great services designed to help someone who is feeling suicidal, and some are specifically designed for men. You could point them in the direction of CALM, the Samaritans and others - there's a list of organisations on our website. Sometimes people find it easier to talk to a stranger than friends and family, so these can be a lifeline.

Supporting someone who is struggling to cope can be tough, remember to take care of yourself. Take time to look after your mental and physical health

- get enough sleep, eat well, exercise, and do things you find relaxing and enjoyable.

It can be hard to accept that someone close to you is feeling suicidal and you may feel a range of emotions, including fear, anger, confusion, or frustration which are all normal. It's important not to blame yourself for what is happening and to know that there are limits to what you can do to help.

It may help to share how you're feeling with others. If you want to talk about your feelings or worries, or get support from people with similar experiences, there are helplines, professionals and peer support groups that can help.

Look after you

Keep Checking in

It's a big step to bring up the conversation and you may never realise what impact you had - well done for stepping up.

If you can, don't stop there though - check-in regularly and arrange times to catch-up. If you're mates, it's important to also find time to hang out as friends and keep doing the other things in life that you share an interest in. Face-to-face catch-ups are always better than texting.

Stay in touch
and encourage
small steps

Stay calm, hold steady,
and be confident in
your ability to be there
for someone. It's not
easy, but you don't
need the answers.
Checking in and
listening goes
a long way.

Additional support for you

Zero Suicide Alliance

Free online training – further understand the signs to look out for and the skills required to approach someone who is struggling.

www.zerosuicidealliance.com/training

Services to signpost to

Campaign Against Living Miserably (CALM)

Helpline for people who are down or have hit a wall for any reason.

Open 5pm – midnight, 365 days a year.

Contact: 0800 58 58 58

Shout

Free text support service from all major mobile networks in the UK. Sometimes easier than talking!

24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Text: 85258

Samaritans

Helpline geared towards listening to people in those moments of need.

24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

Contact: 116 123

Papyrus - HOPELINEUK

Advisers work to help people understand why thoughts of suicide might be present and provide support.

9am – midnight every day of the year.

Contact: 0800 068 4141



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