

# WHAT TO DO IF YOU'RE FEELING SUICIDAL



**MEN'S  
MINOS  
MATTER**

# What to do if you're feeling suicidal

If you are feeling suicidal and need help to stay safe now, here are people you can call:

- If you feel that you are in immediate danger of acting or have acted on your suicidal thoughts, don't hesitate - CALL 999 for an ambulance or go to your nearest A&E department.
- Call the Samaritans on 116 123 who offer emotional support 24-hours a day.
- Call the CALM Helpline on 0800 58 58 58 who offer support from 5pm-midnight every day.
- Contact your GP if it is not an immediate emergency but you need advice and support.
- Tell someone you feel comfortable talking to that you are having suicidal thoughts – send a message asking for their support.

**If you are not in immediate danger but are struggling and have suicidal thoughts, below is a resource we hope might help.**

First of all, remember that you're not alone even if it feels like you are. Many people experience thoughts of suicide when they hit a point of crisis. Fortunately, there are many things that can help and people who want to support you.

# Sources of support

Friends and family can be a great source of support and are often the first place we find help. They often have useful ideas, but they might not have the answers. A next step might be to look to people who have been through similar experiences and have managed to overcome struggles. Contacting a helpline can be helpful, or some people may need to seek help from services, professionals and experts.

## Top Tips

- Men are less likely to open up and ask for support. If they do, they often ask for help when things are at a point of crisis. Staying silent makes things worse.
- Try to think of people in your support network who you could talk to – how might you let them know you're not feeling good? What signal could you send (text/email)?
- If you can't think of anyone, that's fine and not uncommon. Consider calling a helpline. Speaking anonymously can feel easier. If a helpline feels too much try one of the text support services, like Shout (text 85258 for support any time of day) or the CALM webchat (open 5pm-midnight).
- Explore any services or community resources that you might be able to approach, both NHS and beyond. You can find links to services on our website: [www.mensmindsmatter.org/mental-health-services](http://www.mensmindsmatter.org/mental-health-services).

Reach  
out

## Deal with immediate dangers

Beyond your suicidal thoughts, there may be things that require your immediate attention and threaten your safety. For example, domestic violence, risk of homelessness, financial insecurity, or abuse. It's important that things are in place to mitigate any immediate dangers as a priority. Once the immediate risks are dealt with, you can take a step back and reassess what to do next.

**Prioritise your safety and security**

**Get alternative perspectives**

## How did I get here?

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For some people it's hard to know how they reached the point of considering suicide and they might need help to get to the crux of the problem. For men in particular, they may not be fully aware of a problem until things are at their worst, which gives little time for exploring all the options.

People can easily get lost when they try to work things out in their own minds. If you find yourself

unable to find the cause of your problems or an acceptable resolution, and you're thinking of ending your life, it's essential that you get alternative perspectives. This is one of the reasons why it's beneficial to start talking. Don't expect yourself to fix things on your own.

**Once we understand the problem(s), we can find ways to resolve them and the distress they are causing.**

# Common Causes of Crises

## EXPLORE COPING SKILLS

Life crises and traumas are the result of events that threaten our safety and/or lead to significant loss in our lives.

Examples include:

Economic / financial problems	Workplace stress	Threat to self or others	Relationship problems
Physical health problems	Homelessness	Isolation	Domestic violence
Loss of a secure environment	Sleep problems	Loss of self	Bullying (historical / current)
Major life loss	Sudden changes to circumstances	Bereavement	Trauma
Loss of pleasure & enjoyment	Self-neglect	Abuse (historical / current)	Vulnerability to harm
-	Poverty	Drug and alcohol problems	-

We will all experience crises and will inevitably have to face challenging times in our lives.

It's important to be prepared for how to deal with difficulties when they come, and to be open to exploring new ways of coping if you don't have existing strategies.

There are things we naturally do in reaction to crises that can be helpful, but there are also things that can unintentionally make the problems worse. Unfortunately, most of us have never been taught the best way to deal with challenges in life, so it's common for people to struggle more than they need to.

### Top Tips

- Try to think about what's happened in your life recently that might have contributed to your current struggles. Write these things down.
- Don't spend too long on this exercise, and if you can't easily identify causes don't keep looking. Going over and over things in your mind won't help.
- If you are unable to identify the causes, it's no wonder you can't find a solution. Time to get some alternative perspectives.
- Try to do this exercise during daytime waking hours so as not to disturb your precious sleep. When faced with difficult times it's important to get rest from them.

# When thinking becomes part of the problem

**When we experience a crisis, our mind will want to stay focused on the problem, searching for a solution. As humans, we're designed to give attention to threatening situations over pleasurable experiences in order to stay alive. But in some cases, this strategy can actually make the problem worse.**

Without a resolution, the uncomfortable emotions linked to our difficulties become more intense, a search for a solution continues, and a distressing cycle is created. When we get stuck in this cycle, we can feel hopeless, helpless, trapped and defeated. Once here, it can feel like the walls are closing in. Without an acceptable solution, thoughts of suicide can emerge as the ultimate escape.

When our thoughts get stuck on a problem at the expense of everything else, we move further into despair. Once this gathers momentum, it's hard to step away. Getting trapped in this cycle stops us thinking clearly, and cognitive biases lead us to see the worst or be blind to the positives. Problem-focused thought can prevent us from reaching our goals, makes it harder to concentrate, prevents us from sleeping, and increases emotional distress and pain.

The mind's natural response to problems is to think about how to resolve them. This is our go-to strategy and, because it usually works, we believe that thinking will eventually solve things. This is not always the case and being stuck in this way of thinking without a resolution can itself become a problem due to the negative impact it has on our mood. But, with the right tools we can learn

# Create space from problems

to detach from problems, give our mind a welcomed rest and reboot the system so that the mind starts seeing things in a more balanced way again.

The key is to find moments when you can divert your attention away from the problems you face. This is hard to do because you'll naturally want to focus on them, but it's essential in order to keep your mind functioning well.

Distraction is a good technique if your thoughts are fused with problems. However, there are more technical ways of achieving relief through practices like mindfulness and attention training that have longer lasting benefits.

## Top Tips

- Check out our page on distraction ([www.mensmindsmatter.org/distraction](http://www.mensmindsmatter.org/distraction)). It's a great technique in times of crisis to help you get a break from an overactive problem-focused mind.
- If it feels possible, begin to explore mindfulness as a practice. It can be particularly hard to do during difficult times, but it's a more effective long-term strategy. If you can't manage it now, remember to come back to it once things have settled.

# Shutting down and overcontrolling emotions

**For some people a crisis can provoke such a powerful response that they decide to numb how they're feeling. Some people may have learnt to shut out emotions from an early age, so will have less awareness of their emotional experience generally.**

Shutting down feelings when they become too intense offers relief from emotional distress and pain. However, we can't selectively shut out feelings. If we shut one down, we shut them all down, including feelings of joy and connectedness. Essentially, by numbing unpleasant feelings, we also lose our enjoyment and

pleasure, our sense of satisfaction and achievement, and our general connection with life.

We are often told from an early age that emotions are bad, and men in particular are socialised to disconnect from their feelings. But this compromises our capacity to use feelings to our benefit and means that we risk not noticing when problems arise. Shutting down emotions also leads to emotional isolation and lifelong loneliness which can be very painful. Men are also more likely to numb through drugs, alcohol, sex, gambling, and other behaviours that make problems worse.

**Essentially, we need to feel – but not too much!**

## Emotions connect us

### Top Tips

- Learn techniques to manage emotional distress that do not involve numbing.
- Build up your emotional vocabulary by learning about the messages different emotions bring.
- Try to express to others how you are feeling. You can do this after an event if it's not possible at the time.
- Try to tune into how you are experiencing the world through your felt experiences and your senses.
- Do not withdraw and isolate for too long or shutdown too much when things get tough. It's OK to back away from things, but it's important to keep up a basic routine and continue to engage with the world around you.

## Avoid numbing your feelings

# Too much feeling and emotion

## Turn down the volume

**We know something is wrong because we feel it, but we don't know we have a problem if we can't feel things!**

In our experience, not being in touch with our emotions, or feeling too much, drives suicidal thoughts, plans and intentions to act on them. It's not necessarily problems themselves that people are trying to escape from when they consider suicide, but the way they are feeling or the absence of feeling. If you find yourself fighting or wanting to escape your feelings, you're going to experience difficulties. Similarly, if you've shut your feelings down or learnt to shut them out, you're going to experience difficulties.

**When emotions become too intense**

For many people crises are accompanied with intense emotional responses. These feelings can persist and become more intense as we struggle to resolve them. Constantly doing battle with powerful emotions can lead to psychological problems and escalating emotional distress and pain. If things reach this point, your emotions have become part of the problem, and the difficulties you experience managing them can lead you to see emotion as a threat. This leads to more anxiety and fear.

If you're struggling with strong, intense and unabating emotions, it's time to start focusing on turning down their volume. Too much emotion impairs our mind's capacity to function effectively, making it less likely that we'll work through our problems. Emotions are designed to guide us, not harm us, and too much emotion will send us down the wrong path – we are more likely to react on impulse, make mistakes, and do things we might later regret.

### Top Tips

- There are a number of techniques you can use to soothe emotions. Our favourite is soothing rhythm breathing which can be used both in the moment and as a regular practice.
- You could also try meditations, mindfulness practices, relaxation strategies, grounding techniques, progressive muscle relaxation, intense exercise, or TIPP skills.
- It's really hard to stay calm in times of crisis, so you may well find these practices difficult and that's OK.
- If sitting practices feel too much, try doing some deep breathing with movement. The more you can introduce deep breathing the better.

## Avoid fighting your feelings

# Get back to basics

Crises and traumatic events can consume our whole life, leaving little room for anything else. When our mind and body are constantly trying to deal with threats to our wellbeing, our energy levels deplete, our appetite can be reduced, our sleep can become disrupted, and contact with other people can feel like too much effort.

## Lay the right foundations

## Accept and adapt

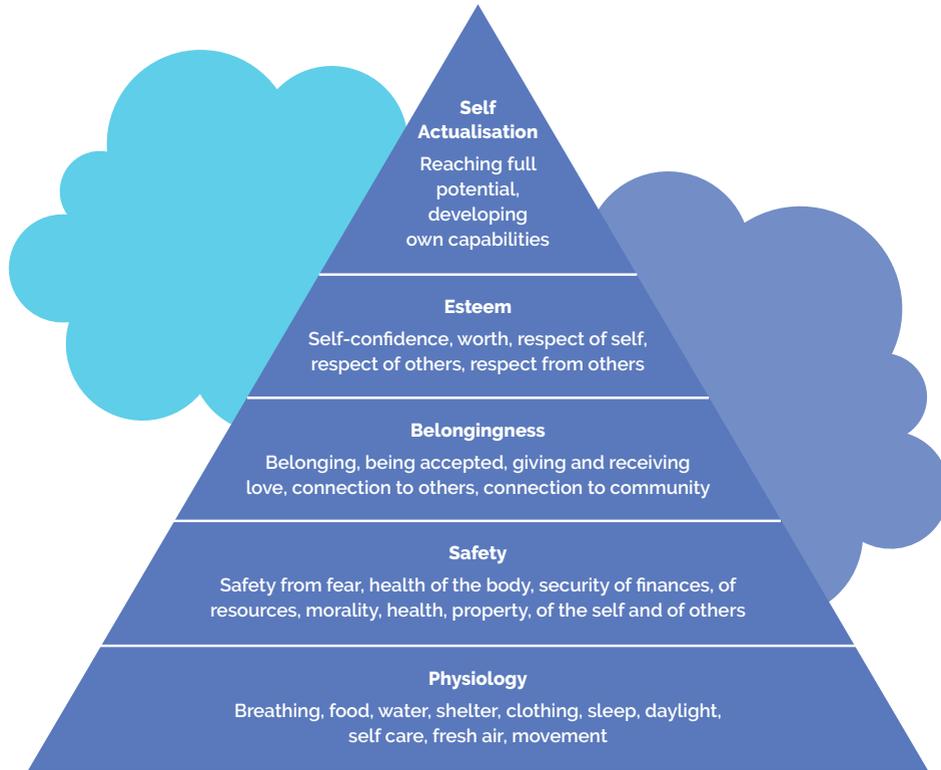
**When you don't feel able to do small tasks that were once easy, take it slow. Trying to power on will end up leading to more feelings of frustration and hopelessness when you simply can't do what you expect of yourself. The most important thing right now is accepting what you can and cannot do and adapting to this.**

It might feel tough to accept that you can't do all you once could right now, but rather than trying to function as normal, you might need to return to the basics. Building and maintaining the right foundations is key to refocusing and resetting when we feel lost or trapped. With strong foundations, other things in life will become easier to manage.

We all need certain things to be able to function effectively, like eating, drinking water, moving around, looking after our self-care, remaining in contact with the outside world, and sleeping well. These are all essential needs which are often compromised during difficult times. People often forget the basics when faced with bigger issues but getting these essential things right can help to create solid foundations to help us get through difficult times.

**The concept of different levels of needs was introduced by psychologist Abraham Maslow and is a helpful reminder of how to build the right foundations for wellbeing.**

# Maslow's Hierarchy of needs - adapted



**In a crisis, it's important that you get the basics right first. You'll struggle to maintain functioning above the level of safety because crises in essence disrupt at this level.**

Connecting with others will be difficult, feeling good about ourself may not be easy,

and functioning at a high level will be impaired, until the crisis resolves.

Strip things right back, do the essentials, and stick with it. Don't expect too much of yourself and allow yourself to give a little less in other areas of your life until the crisis has passed. You do not have endless resources.

# Behaviour that can unintentionally make problems worse

In a crisis, most of your behaviour will be focused on trying to deal with the problem until it's fixed, or in the absence of a fix, you may instinctively feel like withdrawing or avoiding things. Below are some instinctual responses which can unintentionally make problems worse.

## Avoidance

When you feel under threat, your body's natural response is to fight, run or freeze. While these strategies might help if you're under attack from a predator, they are less useful against modern-day threats, like workplace stress or relationship problems. Another natural response to feeling anxious about something is to avoid it. But avoidance as a long-term strategy rarely works out and contributes to fears that get in

the way of us leading the lives we want. Facing our fears (if they are not life threatening) is important for new learning.

## Withdrawal and isolation

One of the most common responses we see during times of crisis is people withdrawing from their usual activities and isolating themselves from their relationships. This is a common response to loss or feeling lost and defeated. If you feel like you've lost motivation or interest in things that you once enjoyed, it can feel confusing and frustrating. Withdrawing and isolating can feel like the right thing to do and is an attempt to preserve ourselves. However, it's the main factor contributing to depressed mood, particularly when people withdraw too far.

**Persevere**

### Hitting out

In anger, people can hit out at others and the world around them. It causes all sorts of problems – both during childhood and later life. The moment people get angry, aggressive or violent, the reason(s) for their reaction gets lost and the focus is on the angry person being the problem. This can lead to a further sense of injustice, misunderstanding and anger. Aggression and violence are rarely called for and it's important to not act in ways that can cause harm to others.

### Powering on

When people are under pressure and have stressors building up, they may try to power through.

This might involve trying to do more to keep up, expecting themselves to be able to get everything done, continuing to try to impress others, or neglecting their need to rest. While it's possible to sometimes power on through, over long or intense periods it can lead to people burning out.

It's important to listen to how you are feeling and respond in ways that do not amplify or feed into ideas of ending your life. If you feel like things have got on top of you and you don't know what to do, are constantly focused on problems, feel trapped, helpless, or feel like giving up, then it's time to get some help. Your life matters and difficult times do pass.

**Suicide is a bad solution in the absence of any other. There are other options, you just haven't found them yet. Stay connected, feel but not too much, find space from problems, and get the basics right. This will pass.**

**Stay connected with the world around you**

# Additional support for you

## 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**

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## Samaritans

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

24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

**Contact: 116 123**

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## 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**

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## 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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