



County Durham and Darlington

Are you worried about
someone who is **distressed**
or thinking about **suicide**?



Committed to improving the mental health of our population



Suicide - what you can do to help

It is distressing to realise that someone close to you may be considering taking their own life. If you believe someone is thinking about ending their life it's natural to feel panic or even want to avoid thinking about it. This information will help you decide what you can do to help.

Why does someone consider suicide?

People considering suicide often feel very isolated and alone. They may feel that nobody can help them or understand their psychological pain. When unable to see any other way of dealing with pain, it may seem to be the only way out to them at that time. The important thing to remember is that if someone is showing signs that arouse your concern you need to check it out. Typically, many factors are involved. Some life events can increase a person's risk of suicide, such as recent loss (a loved one, a job, an income / livelihood), a major disappointment (relationship breakdown, separation from children, failed exams, missed job promotions) or a mental illness.

Suicide warning signs – what to look out for

Some of the warning signs to look out for include:

- Sudden changes in mood or behaviour
- Being sad and withdrawn
- Talking of feeling hopeless, helpless or worthless
- Taking less care of themselves
- Expressing thoughts about death through drawings, stories, songs etc
- Expressing suicidal thoughts
- A suicide attempt or act of self-harm
- Increased use of alcohol or drugs

Suicide warning signs – what to look out for

Talking about suicide or making a plan

But also take seriously statements such as “I wish I could just go to sleep and not wake up”, “I can’t go on”, “I’d be better off dead”, “Everyone’s better off without me”.

Looking for ways to kill themselves.

Unusual focus on death, dying, or violence; perhaps writing poems, or stories, about death.

Displaying signs of depression such as feeling helpless or trapped

Feeling that there is no hope - “There’s no way out”

Not sleeping or eating well or becoming very anxious.

Having feelings of worthlessness, guilt, shame, and self-hatred; feeling like a burden - “Everyone would be better off without me”.

Getting affairs in order

This may include making out a will, giving away prized possessions or making arrangements for family members.

Saying goodbye

Saying goodbye to people as if they won’t be seen again; unusual or unexpected visits or calls to family and friends.

Withdrawing from others and increasing social isolation.

Feeling rage or uncontrolled anger.

Taking unnecessary risks as if they have a “death wish”.

Sudden sense of calm

Sometimes people who have been distressed and suicidal become outwardly calm.

Be aware that this may mean many things, including their quiet resolution to complete their suicide plan.

Self harm

All acts of self-harm should be taken seriously. Whilst self harm is a communication of intense distress, people who self harm are at a high risk of suicide.

Suicide risk factors: what to look out for

The following may increase the risk of suicide:

- Access to a method of suicide, e.g. medication, firearms
- Loss of someone close (such as a friend or family member)
- Relationship break-up
- Recent contact with criminal justice services (e.g. police), victim of crime or release from prison.

Some of these warning signs can be associated with everyday behaviour and should be looked at as part of the overall picture of the person you are concerned about. However, the more warning signs and risk factors there are, the higher the possible risk is.

Please note - if someone says they want to kill themselves this should be taken seriously. In the past it was said that people who talked about suicide or had already attempted suicide didn't really want to die – this isn't true.

What can you do to help?

People who consider taking their own lives can be helped to get through the crisis. The help and support of family, friends and professionals can make a big difference. If someone confides in you, listen carefully to everything they say and try not to judge or offer too much unwelcome advice. Sometimes just being there and showing that you care enough to listen can help.

You could let them know that others feel like this too and that they are not alone in trying to cope with suicidal thoughts. There are people who can help them. If they will not talk to you, perhaps they would talk to another friend or a relative, or write down how they feel.

Always try to encourage them to visit their GP if you think they might be suicidal or depressed.

Ten things you can do to help

There are several things you can do to help someone who may be suicidal. You may find the ten suggestions below helpful.

- 1 Do something now**
If you are concerned that someone you know is considering suicide, act promptly. Don't assume that they will get better without help or that they will seek help on their own. Reaching out now could save a life.
- 2 Acknowledge your reaction**
Your natural reaction may be to panic, ignore the situation and hope it will go away, or look for quick-fix solutions to make the person feel better. These reactions are common. If you find you're really struggling, enlist the help of a trusted friend.
- 3 Be there for them**
Spend time with the person and express your care and concern. Ask them how they are feeling, and listen to what's on their mind. Let them do most of the talking. Problems can seem more manageable after speaking about them. Offer support and let them know you care. Say something like: 'I'm worried about you and I want to help'.
- 4 Ask if they are thinking of suicide**
The only way to know if a person is thinking about suicide is to ask. It can often be a relief for people to be asked about what they are feeling. Asking can sometimes be very hard but it shows that you have noticed things, been listening, that you care and that they are not on their own.

Talking about suicide will not put the idea into their head but will encourage them to talk about their feelings. If they have been thinking of suicide, they will probably be relieved to talk about it and grateful that you are willing to be so open and understanding. Don't agree to keep their suicidal thoughts or plans a secret. It is not easy to ask about suicide ideas; it is helpful to lead into the topic gradually with due attention to the person. For example:

- Do you feel unhappy and hopeless?
- Do you feel unable to face each day?
- Do you feel life is not worth living?
- Do you feel like ending your life?
- Do you feel desperate?
- Do you feel life is a burden?
- Do you feel like harming yourself?
- Do you ever feel so bad that you think of suicide?

5 Check out their safety

If a person is considering taking their own life it is important to know how much thought they have put into it. You could ask about the following:

- Have they thought about how and when they plan to kill themselves?
- Do they have the means to carry out their plan?
- What support can they access to stay safe and get help?
- How can you help them draw on links to family, friends, pets, religious convictions, personal coping strengths?

If you are really worried, don't leave the person alone. Remove any means of suicide available, including weapons, medications, alcohol and other drugs, even access to a car.


The person can get help from a range of professional and supportive people:

- General Practitioner (family doctor)
- For urgent access to services - people in County Durham and Darlington can **ring 111 - 24 hours a day, 365 days a year**
- Services such as the Samaritans - **ring 08457 90 90 90 (24 hour helpline)**
- Counsellor, psychologist, social worker
- School counsellor, youth group leader
- Priest, minister, religious leader.

See **Useful Contacts** for information about how to contact these services.

6 Decide what to do

Now that you have this information you need to discuss together what steps you are going to take. You may need to enlist the help of others to persuade the person to get professional help - or at least take the first steps to stay safe. These may include their partners, parents, or close friends. Only by sharing this information can you make sure that the person gets the help and support they need.

- 
- 7 Take action** When the person has decided who they are most willing to tell, help them prepare what they will say. Offer to accompany the person to the appointment. Help them follow through with the recommendations made at the appointment.

In some situations the person may refuse to get help. While it's important that you help them find help, you can't force them to accept it. You need to ensure that the appropriate people are aware of the situation. Do not shoulder this responsibility alone.

- 8 Ask for a promise** Thoughts of suicide often return and when they do it is important for the person to again reach out and tell someone. Asking them to promise to do this makes it more likely that they will actually seek help.

- 9 Look after yourself** If you're helping someone who is considering suicide, make sure you also take care of yourself. It is difficult and emotionally draining to support someone who is suicidal, especially over an extended period. Don't do it on your own. Find someone to talk to, maybe friends, family or a professional.

- 10 Stay involved** Thoughts of suicide do not easily disappear without the person at risk experiencing some change in their life or personal circumstances. Their situation, or their feelings about it may change, or they may feel more supported and able to deal with it. In either situation, the continuing involvement of family and friends is very important.

Suicidal thoughts do not easily go away on their own. People need help to overcome these thoughts. Your help can make all the difference.

Starting a difficult conversation

There are some suggestions available from the Samaritans which will help you to start a difficult conversation with someone you are concerned about. These cover advice on how to ask the right questions to find out how they are feeling and checking they know where to get help.

See www.samaritans.org.uk under the section 'Your Emotional Help'.



Useful Contacts

Main contacts

People in County Durham and Darlington can ring 111 for urgent access to services - 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

Contact your general practitioner (GP). If you do not have a GP or do not know your GP's telephone number contact 111 if you live in County Durham or Darlington or visit www.nhs.uk

SAMARITANS: Confidential non-judgmental emotional support, for people experiencing feelings of distress or despair, including those which may lead to suicide. They offer their service by telephone, email and letter, and face to face in most of their branches.

Phone: 08457 90 90 90 (24 hour helpline)

Email: jo@samaritans.org

Write to: Chris, PO Box 9090, Stirling, FK8 2SA

Website: www.samaritans.org.uk

Other useful contacts

PAPYRUS Young suicide prevention society (under the age of 35)

Phone: HOPElineUK 0800 068 4141

Website: www.papyrus-uk.org

Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide (SOBS)

The Flamstead Centre, Albert Street, Ilkeston, Derbyshire DE7 5GU

helpline: 0844 561 6855 web: www.uk-sobs.org.uk

Emotional and practical support and local groups

Cruse Bereavement Care

tel. 0844 477 4900 web: www.crusebereavementcare.org.uk

Helpline and advice for those affected by a death

Depression Alliance

tel. 0845 123 2320 web: www.depressionalliance.org

For anyone affected by depression

British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy

tel. 01455 883 316 web: www.bacp.co.uk

For details of local practitioners

Carers UK

20 Great Dover Street, London SE1 4LX

helpline: 0808 808 7777 web: www.carersuk.org

Information and advice on all aspects of caring

www.adviceguide.org.uk

for advice on a range of issues including money, family and daily life



This information is available in other formats and in other languages by telephoning 0191 3333386

هذه المعلومة متوفرة في أشكال و لغات اخرى من خلال الاتصال بالهاتف رقم 0191 3333386

本信息有其它格式或语言版本可供索取，如有需要，请致电 0191 3333386

با تماس با تلفن 0191 3333386 می توانید این اطلاعات را در فرمت ها و زبان های دیگری دریافت کنید.

Cette information est disponible dans d'autres formats et dans d'autres langues en appelant le 0191 3333386

دفتوانن به پیوندی کردن به ژماره تلهفونی 0191 3333386 وه نهم زانباربانه له فورمتگمل و زمانگملی تر ودرگرن.

Aby otrzymać te informacje w innych formatach lub językach, prosimy o kontakt pod numer telefonu 0191 3333386

یہ معلومات دیگر اشکال اور دیگر زبانوں میں بھی دستیاب ہیں، ٹیلی فون کیجئے: 0191 3333386

Health improvement online in County Durham and Darlington
www.health-improvement.cdd.nhs.uk

hpac

The health improvement information and resource library (hpac)
www.hpac.cdd.nhs.uk Telephone: 01325 364270

