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# Core suicide prevention messages for the whole of population

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This document presents a set of core suicide prevention messages for families, whānau, friends, colleagues, teachers and classmates of those who are at risk of suicide. The messages are designed to:

* Be simple, clear and action-based
* Include warning signs and risk factors
* Cover what to do if you are concerned about someone and how to support recovery
* Include self-care for people supporting someone through distress and recovery
* Indicate how to build a support network
* Link to where more information can be found

The messages are written with consideration of a wide audience, including people who have experience of suicidality, and people who have lost loved ones to suicide. They consider that suicide and suicidal behaviour are complex, and people at risk of suicide may have mental health or addiction problems, and may or may not be demonstrating suicidal behaviours (including attempted suicide, deliberate self-harm, and stated suicidal ideation).

These messages are written for the whole-of-population – they are intended to be as appropriate as possible to the widest possible group, while not targeted to any particular population. They may need to be adapted, or presented in different formats, to create information resources for different population groups.

The messages will continue to be tested and developed further with focus groups as they are used to develop suicide prevention resources. The messages will also be shared with relevant agencies and services to use as they consider appropriate, in resources and on websites, so that consistent suicide prevention information is available to the public. This document is not intended as a resource for public use.

These messages have been developed by the Mental Health Foundation on behalf of the Ministry of Health. If you use these messages to develop suicide prevention information resources, please inform the Mental Health Foundation ([info@mentalhealth.org.nz](mailto:info@mentalhealth.org.nz)) about how you are using them.

## General

If you're worried that someone might be thinking about suicide, don't be afraid to ask them directly.

If someone has thoughts or feelings about suicide, it's important to take them seriously.

It can be really hard to tell someone you care about that you are feeling suicidal. If someone tells you they are thinking about suicide, recognise their pain or what they’ve just said and invite them to keep talking.

Let them know there is help available to them. Encourage them to get help and talk to someone about what they are going through.

Most people who attempt suicide don’t want to die – they just want their pain to end or can't see another way out of their situation.

A person who is thinking about suicide might not ask for help, but that doesn’t mean that help isn’t wanted. They might feel whakamā or ashamed of how they're feeling, like they don't deserve help, or like no-one can help them.

Lots of people feel suicidal at some time in their lives. It can be impossible to have hope that things will get better.

People who feel suicidal often feel like they are alone and that their family, whānau and friends would be better off without them.

Support from people who care about them, and connection with their own sense of culture, identity and purpose, can help them to find a way through.

## What to look out for

### Warning signs for suicide

Most people thinking about taking their own life will try to let someone know, but they often won't say so directly.

If someone shows one or more of these signs, it doesn't necessarily mean they are suicidal, but it’s likely they need your support. You might notice they:

* access things they could use to hurt themselves, like a rope or gun
* read or write about suicide online, or post photos or videos about suicide
* become obsessed with death
* become isolated or withdrawn from family, whānau and friends
* don't seem to be coping with any problems they may be having
* tell you they want to die or kill themselves
* have changes in mood – becoming depressed, angry or enraged
* hurt themselves – for example, cutting skin or taking an overdose
* feel worthless, guilty, whakamā or ashamed
* have no hope for the future
* use drugs or alcohol to cope with difficult feelings or thoughts
* lose or gain a lot of weight, or have unusual eating patterns
* sleep a lot more than usual, or stop getting enough sleep
* seem to have lost interest in life, or things they used to enjoy
* give away possessions, pay back debts or 'tie up loose ends'
* stop taking their medication
* suddenly seem calm or happy after they have been depressed or suicidal

Some people who are suicidal might not show these signs, and some warning signs may not be obvious. People who feel suicidal might try to hide what they are going through or pretend they are okay.

If you think that someone might be at risk, pay attention to changes in their behavior, trust your instincts and ask them directly if they are thinking about suicide.

## Who is most at risk of suicide?

People from all backgrounds can feel suicidal. Lots of people go through this. Someone may be at higher risk if they have:

* attempted suicide before
* been experiencing depression, an eating disorder or another mental illness
* an addiction to alcohol, drugs or gambling
* a serious physical illness
* just started or stopped taking medication for a mental health problem
* lost a friend or family member to suicide
* been a victim of violence, bullying or sexual abuse
* recently broken up with their partner or lost custody of their children
* a court case coming up or a recent prison sentence
* been judged, shamed or put under a lot of pressure
* no strong relationships with family, whānau, friends or community
* no sense of their own culture, identity or purpose in life
* been through a major life change, like moving to a different country, coming out as gay or transgender, or retiring from work
* had a major loss or disappointment, like someone close to them dying, failing exams or being dropped from their sports team, or having their refugee status declined
* been struggling to find work, lost their job recently, or had serious money problems
* friends, family or people around them who don't accept or support who they are, like their sexuality, gender identity, culture or religion

## How to help when you're worried about someone

### In a crisis or emergency

If someone has attempted suicide or you're worried about their immediate safety, do the following:

* Call your local [mental health crisis assessment team](http://www.health.govt.nz/your-health/services-and-support/health-care-services/mental-health-services/crisis-assessment-teams) or go with them to the emergency department (ED) at your nearest hospital.
* If they are an immediate physical danger to themselves or others, call 111.
* Stay with them until support arrives.
* Remove any obvious means of suicide they might use (e.g. rope, pills, guns, car keys, knives).
* Try to stay calm and let them know you care.
* Keep them talking: listen and ask questions without judging.
* Make sure you are safe.

### If you think someone is at risk

**If you are worried that someone is suicidal, ask them. It could save their life.**

Asking about suicide in a supportive way will not put the thought in their head.

Ask them directly about their thoughts of suicide and what they are planning. If they have a specific plan, they need help right away.

Ask them if they would like to talk about what’s going on for them with you or someone else. They might not want to open up straight away, but letting them know you are there for them is a big help.

Listen and don’t judge. Take them seriously and let them know you care.

Help them to find and access the support they need from people they trust: friends, family, kaumātua, faith, community or cultural leaders, or professionals.

Don't leave them alone – make sure someone stays with them until they get help.

Support them to access professional help, like a doctor or counsellor, as soon as possible. Offer to help them make an appointment, and go with them if you can.

If they don't get the help they need the first time, keep trying. Ask them if they would like your help explaining what they need to a professional.

### How to be supportive

Be gentle and compassionate with them.

Don't judge them – even if you can't understand why they are feeling this way, accept that they are.

Try to stay calm, positive and hopeful that things can get better.

If they are comforted by prayer or karakia, invite them to pray with you.

You don't need to have all the answers, or to offer advice. The best thing you can do is be there and listen.

Let them talk about their thoughts of suicide – avoiding the topic does not help. Ask them if they've felt this way before, and what they did to cope or get through it. They might already know what could help them.

Do not agree to keep secrets about their suicidal thoughts or plans. It's okay to tell someone else so that you can keep them safe.

Don't pressure them to talk to you. They might not want to talk, or they might feel more comfortable talking to someone who is not as close to them.

Don't try to handle the situation by yourself. Seek support from professionals, and from other people they trust including family, whānau or friends.

## How to support recovery

If you're supporting someone who is recovering after they have made a suicide attempt, or have felt suicidal, be prepared to be there, offer support and stay involved. Recovery can take time.

You might need to be prepared to have difficult conversations about what's going on in their life and how they are feeling.

Keep listening to them and don’t avoid talking about suicide or the hard things in their life.

Don't give up on them and try not to lose contact with them, even if it seems like they are ignoring you.

Help them feel there is hope of things getting better – identify positive things in their life.

If they don’t want to talk with you, ask other people you both trust to support them – friends, family or whānau members, youth workers or others.

Help them to access professional help, like a doctor or counsellor. You could offer to go with them or help them to make appointments. Let them know about free counselling services like Lifeline and Youthline and give them the contact details.

Encourage and support them to do the things they enjoy, keep physically active and connect with others.

Help them identify any ways they can change their lifestyle to restore balance. This might mean cutting back on alcohol or drugs, doing some exercise, making time for themselves, or getting enough sleep.

Accept them for who they are and let them know you care.

When they're ready, support them to make plans for their future, solve problems and set goals.

## Look after yourself

It is very important to take care of yourself when you are caring for others.

The person you’re supporting could recover quite soon, but they may feel the way they do for weeks, months or even years. Looking after yourself is essential to be able to walk alongside them.

Make sure you’re getting enough sleep, eating properly and exercising.

Be kind to yourself, and take time out when you need to. Being in this situation can be very difficult, and you can’t do everything.

It’s normal to feel scared, powerless or unsure of how to help. Find someone you can talk to about this – a friend or family member you trust, or a counsellor.

It's not helpful to blame yourself if someone close to you attempts suicide.

## How to build a support network

It’s important to involve others to help you and the person you're supporting – don't try to do everything yourself.

To build a support network:

* Ask the person you're supporting to tell you what they need, what works for them and who should be involved.
* Your support network might include cultural elders, faith leaders or community groups they're part of, as well as friends, family and whānau. It might include people who have been through something similar to the person you're supporting, and can share how they got through it.
* Bring the group together in a safe space.
* Talk openly and honestly about the situation.
* Talk to them about what they will do if they feel suicidal again, how they plan to keep safe, and how others can help with this.
* Develop a plan together to support the person – identify how different people can help. Get professional help if you need it. Talk to your local doctor, medical centre, community mental health team or counselling service.

## More information and support

For more information and support, talk to your local doctor, medical centre, hauora, community mental health team, school counsellor or counselling service.

If you don't get the help you need the first time, keep trying.

Below is a list of some of the services available which offer support, information and help. All services are free, and are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week unless otherwise stated.

**For counselling and support**

* [**Lifeline**](http://www.lifeline.co.nz/) **–** 0800 543 354  
  (for counselling and support).
* [**Depression Helpline**](http://www.depression.org.nz/) **–** 0800 111 757  
  (to talk to a trained counsellor about how you are feeling or to ask any questions).
* **Tautoko** [**Suicide Crisis Helpline**](http://www.lifeline.org.nz/Suicide-Intervention_2022.aspx) **–** 0508 828 865 (0508 TAUTOKO)   
  (for people in distress, and people who are worried about someone else).
* [**Healthline**](http://www.health.govt.nz/your-health/services-and-support/health-care-services/healthline) **–** 0800 611 116  
  (for advice from trained registered nurses).
* [**Samaritans**](http://samaritans.org.nz/) **–** 0800 726 666  
  (for confidential support to anyone who is lonely or in emotional distress).
* **Chinese Lifeline** – 0800 888 880  
  (for people who speak Mandarin or Cantonese)
* [**www.depression.org.nz**](http://www.depression.org.nz/) – includes The Journal free online self-help tool.

**For children and young people**

* [**Youthline**](http://www.youthline.co.nz/) – 0800 376 633, free text 234 or email [talk@youthline.co.nz](javascript:void(null);)  
  (for young people, and their parents, whānau and friends).
* [**What's Up**](http://www.whatsup.co.nz/) – 0800 942 8787 (0800 WHATSUP)  
  (for 5-18 year olds; 1 pm to 11 pm).
* [**Kidsline**](http://www.kidsline.org.nz/) – 0800 543 754 (0800 KIDSLINE)   
  (for children up to 14 years of age).
* [**www.thelowdown.co.nz**](http://www.thelowdown.co.nz/) – visit the website, or free text 5626  
  (support for young people experiencing depression or anxiety)
* [**SPARX.org.nz**](https://www.sparx.org.nz/) – an online self-help tool that teaches young people the key skills needed to help combat depression and anxiety.

**For help with specific issues**

* [**OUTLine NZ**](http://www.outline.org.nz/) – 0800 688 5463 (0800 OUTLINE)   
  (for sexuality or gender identity issues; 10am-9pm M-F, and 6pm-8pm S-S).
* **Alcohol Drug Helpline** – 0800 787 797  
  (for people dealing with an alcohol or other drug problem; 10am – 10pm)
* [**Women's Refuge Crisisline**](https://www.womensrefuge.org.nz/)– 0800 733 843 (0800 REFUGE)  
  (for women living with violence, or in fear, in their relationship or family)
* [**Shakti Crisis Line**](http://shakti-international.org/shakti-nz/) - 0800 742 584 (0800 SHAKTI)  
  (for migrant or refugee women living with family violence)
* [**Rape Crisis**](http://www.rapecrisisnz.org.nz/) – 0800 883 300  
  (for support after rape or sexual assault)
* [**PlunketLine**](https://www.plunket.org.nz) – 0800 933 922  
  (support for new parents, including mothers experiencing post-natal depression)
* [**Rural Support**](http://www.rural-support.org.nz/) – 0800 787 254  
  (for people in rural communities dealing with financial or personal challenges)

**For families, whānau, friends and supporters**

* [**Skylight**](http://skylight.org.nz/)– 0800 299 100  
  (for support through trauma, loss and grief; 9am-5pm weekdays)
* [**Supporting Families In Mental Illness**](http://www.supportingfamilies.org.nz/) - 0800 732 825  
  (for families and whānau supporting a loved one who has a mental illness)
* [**Le Va**](http://www.leva.co.nz/) - – [www.leva.co.nz](http://www.leva.co.nz) - www.facebook.com/LeVaPasifika  
  (information and support for Pasifika families through the FLO suicide prevention programme)
* [**Common Ground**](http://www.commonground.org.nz/) – [www.commonground.org.nz](http://www.commonground.org.nz) - a central hub providing parents, family, whānau and friends with access to information, tools and support to help a young person who’s struggling.
* [**Mental Health Foundation**](http://www.mentalhealth.org.nz) – [www.mentalhealth.org.nz](http://www.mentalhealth.org.nz) - for more information about supporting someone in distress, looking after your mental health and working towards recovery.