

Suicide & Mental Health

Part 1

Key Points

- Depression is a major risk factor for suicidal behaviour
- Thoughts of self-harm or suicidal ideation caused by a mental health disorder are symptomatic of the disorder. Not acting on these thoughts is very important as they are just thoughts and do not mean you have to actually harm yourself
- Early action is critical for reducing the risk of suicide. Identify your warning signs; remind yourself about your reasons for living; take steps to ensure safety in your environment and prioritise spending time connecting with other people. Ask for help to you keep safe
- Immediate support is always available so if you or someone you know is thinking about suicide, get help. You are not alone
- If your life or the life of someone you care about is in danger, contact emergency services on 000

Mental Health and Mental Health Challenges

Mental Health is defined as “a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community.” The World Health Organisation (WHO)

About 1 in 5 Australians will suffer some form of a mental health issue every year. While everyone experiences a range of emotions including sadness, worry, anger or disappointment, a mental health disorder is an intense, pervasive and persistent experience that interferes with a person’s day to day life and relationships – both at work and in their personal life. A mental health disorder is distressing and can significantly affect how a person thinks, feels and behaves. Examples of diagnosable mental health disorders include depressive disorders, anxiety disorders, substance-related disorders, bipolar disorder and schizophrenia. While no clear causes of mental health disorders exist, a number of factors increase a person’s susceptibility to these conditions. Major life changes, isolation and traumatic life events are just a few of the factors that increase the risk of mental health difficulties.

Depression is a common and serious mental health problem and for many people who live with the condition, it is a disorder that is closely linked with suicide. Figures published by Beyond Blue reveal that approximately 1 million Australians live with depression. Women in Australia are more susceptible to depression than men: over their lifetime, 1 in every 6 women, and 1 in every 8 men are likely to experience depression. Approximately 7 Australians die by suicide every day with males accounting for 5 of these 7 deaths. Depression is the leading mental health disorder contributing to the risk of suicide.

Remember, if you are experiencing signs and symptoms of depression or thoughts of suicide, you can always reach out to someone for help. You are not alone.

Understanding and managing suicide

Suicide is tragic and causes tremendous sadness and grief for family members and friends left behind as they struggle with understanding why this action was taken. The impact of suicide in the workplace can cause significant distress for colleagues. People experiencing significant emotional loss after the death of a loved one, friend or co-worker to suicide will often need to seek support in coping with their loss and grief.

Reach out and seek help as soon as you need it

If you or someone you know is thinking about suicide, get help immediately: there are many support services available via phone and in person.

Reaching out for immediate support is critical as suicidal thoughts can make it hard to focus on anything else. Thinking about suicide for most people is a sign that they just want the pain to stop and is not a sign that they really want to die or to take actions to end their life.

The following is a short summary of early signs and symptoms to look out for, what to do and where to go for immediate help and support to reduce the risk of suicidal behaviour.



Converge
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Converge International is your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) provider. To make an appointment or speak to a consultant call:

1300 our eap
1300 687 327

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Warning signs

Warning signs include changes in your thoughts, feelings/ moods or behaviours that suggest you may be moving towards an emotional crisis that may lead to thoughts of suicide. Identifying your own, personal warning signs can help you take early action:

- Feeling helpless, hopeless, worthless
- Feeling like a burden
- Excessive guilt
- Sleep problems - sleeping too much or sleeping too little
- Coping difficulties - leading to drinking more alcohol and/ or taking illicit drugs to cope with emotional pain
- Withdrawing from family and friends
- Concentration difficulties or difficulties making decisions
- Loss of interest in activities that were once enjoyable
- Thinking of suicide or feeling that life is not worth living

Reasons to live

When feeling suicidal, the pain you are experiencing can feel overwhelming and can make it difficult to remember all the positives elements, relationships, experiences in your life. Focusing on and reminding yourself about your reasons for living can be helpful to shift your focus until your suicidal thoughts pass. Consider writing down the things in your life, large and small, that are important to you and worth living for. These reasons will be different for each person, but could include:

- Experiences you haven't yet had
- Recreational activities / interests / hobbies
- Pets and animals
- Spending time with close, special friend
- Spending time with a close family member
- Being creative
- Your job
- Seeing your children/ young relatives grow up
- Your faith or spirituality
- Helping others or volunteer work

Make your environment safe

When you are experiencing suicidal thoughts, creating a safe environment is essential. You can take a number of practical steps to make your surroundings harmless by removing anything that could be used to harm yourself or end your life. You should also identify practical steps you can take to avoid all stressful or dangerous situations. Make your environment safe by:

- Giving all medications to someone else who can help manage this for you
- Avoid driving when having suicidal thoughts or urges. Hand your car keys over to someone else to look after
- Avoid taking alcohol and other substances
- Lock up or get rid of any means that could be used to self-harm
- Avoid seeing or speaking with people who you find upsetting
- Seek out the company of, and support of, people who care for you and your safety

Connect with other people and place yourself into social situations

When you are facing a significant mental health crisis, and you are experiencing suicidal feelings, it can feel hard to be sociable. However, participating in activities that distract you from any suicidal thoughts is an important strategy to keep you safe. Also, being around people you like and care for can improve your mood.

- Go to a park that is active and full of people
- Invite a friend over to watch a film / movie
- Go shopping
- Spend some time in a favourite restaurant / café
- Spend time with other people playing games, solving a problem, puzzle, crossword, etc.
- Go to the library
- Go to a sports match

Continues: Suicide & Mental Health – Part 2: Do's, Don'ts & Resources.



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