



First Nations Health Authority
Health through wellness

Suicide: Responding and Keeping People Safe



The COVID-19 pandemic and the public health measures that have been put in place have been a big disruption in all of our lives. It's kept us away from our loved ones, our jobs and schools, and from the gatherings and events that help us feel like we belong.

When big changes like this occur, it's normal to feel overwhelmed. These feelings are the way our minds and bodies tell us that we need to connect with people and strategies that support our mental wellness. Times of crisis can bring on such strong feelings that some people may not know how to cope. They may feel that they have no one to turn to. Some people may even be thinking about taking their own lives.

Connecting with family and friends or talking with a trusted mental health professional helps people cope. Regardless of who a person speaks to, the important thing is finding someone who is willing to listen in a kind and respectful way.

Below are tips and information to help you identify when a person is suicidal and how to keep them safe. This information isn't meant to replace the services of a qualified mental health professional. Suicidal thoughts and behaviours are complex. You should never try to help in ways that put you at risk. A trained professional is able to assess the potential for danger and can determine the safest ways to intervene.

TALKING ABOUT SUICIDE

Having a conversation about suicide is a difficult and brave thing to do. Here are a few tips:

- **Withhold judgment** – A person thinking about suicide might already have some strong, unpleasant feelings about themselves. Being overly confrontational or judgmental about their thoughts of suicide can make things even more difficult.
- **Listen and empathize** – It can be hard to know what to say. Sometimes the most caring thing you can do is to let people know that they are heard. This could be as simple as saying "I hear you" or "This sounds really hard for you. Thank you for sharing with me."
- **Let them guide the conversation** – Remember that your goal is to provide help and keep

them safe. Ask questions, be curious and let them tell you about the help that they need.

- **Seek assistance** – Many people are nervous when talking to others about suicide so it's important to know that you can seek help. If you're not sure what to do or if you're nervous, reach out and connect with someone more experienced who can provide guidance. Crisis lines are a good place to start. Contact information is included at the end of this resource.
- **Be kind** – The words that we use when we talk about suicide aren't as important as how we talk about suicide. Approaching difficult conversations with kindness is often enough to get everyone through in a safe way.

SIGNS THAT A PERSON MAY BE THINKING ABOUT SUICIDE

Here is a list of the types of things a person who is thinking about suicide might say or do. A person who is thinking about suicide might:

- Tell you or someone else that they want to die or not be around anymore. If a person shares that they want to die, please take it seriously and provide support.
- Seem more sad, stressed, worried or angry than usual.
- Suddenly be happy or content after a period of feeling really sad or stressed. A person who makes the decision to die may feel a sense of relief.
- Start, stop or change how they use drugs or alcohol.
- Talk a lot about death and dying.
- Start preparing for suicide by gathering up things they want to use to take their lives or start researching suicide.
- Say good-bye to those who are close to them and give away important personal belongings.
- Talk about feeling like a burden on others or about how alone they feel.
- Talk about feeling trapped or that they have no way out.
- Talk about feeling like there's no hope or that there's nothing they can do.
- Have difficulty sleeping or their sleep schedule might change.
- Do things that are risky and harmful.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU'RE WORRIED

If you're worried that someone you know is thinking of suicide, the most important things you can do are:

- Be open and willing to listen to how they feel.
- Ask them directly if they are thinking about suicide. If they say yes, there are many supports available and many ways to help them. It's important to be as clear and direct as

possible to find out for sure whether the person you are worried about is indeed thinking about suicide. Being direct shows that you are open and this invites them to talk to you about suicide.

- Encourage them to seek help by calling a crisis line, connecting with a mental health professional such as a doctor, nurse, social worker, psychologist, counsellor or Elder or seeking cultural support.
- Make some of those phone calls and referrals with them if they cannot do it themselves or seem reluctant.

If someone is actively trying to harm themselves, call 9-1-1 or take them to the nearest emergency department.

CRISIS LINES

HOPE FOR WELLNESS

Helpline (toll-free): 1-855-242-3310

Online chat: <https://www.hopeforwellness.ca>

Offers immediate mental health counselling and crisis intervention to all Indigenous people across Canada.

KUU-US CRISIS LINE

Adult Crisis Line: 250-723-4050

Youth Crisis Line: 250-723-2040

Phone (toll-free): 1-800-588-8717

Website: <https://www.kuu-uscrisisline.com>

310 MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

Phone: 310-6789 (no area code needed)

This number will connect you to your local BC crisis line without a wait or busy signal, 24 hours a day.

YOUTH IN BC

Online chat: <https://youthinbc.com>

Online chat available from noon to 1 a.m. in BC.

KIDS HELP PHONE

Phone: 1-800-668-6868

Website: <https://kidshelpphone.ca>

Chat and text support: text "CONNECT" to 686868

Counsellors available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.