What to do next

Here are some suggestions and sources of support. If at first you don’t find the help you need, persist. Try all avenues and don’t give up.

If someone tells you they’re feeling suicidal...

• Make sure they’re not left alone
• Remove anything they could use to take their own life, e.g. tablets, firearms, rope
• Get medical help immediately

Get medical help

• Phone your GP surgery (outside normal surgery hours, you’ll be directed to an out-of-hours service)
• Call 999 or take them to A&E and stay with them until they are seen by a member of the mental health team

Even if it’s only a hunch, share your concerns with others

• Don’t be afraid to involve their family, friends or colleagues
• Share this leaflet with others and plan together how you are going to keep the person safe

Take care of yourself

• Talk to your own GP about your feelings
• Confide in a trusted friend
• Find a support group for carers of people with mental health problems
• If the person does take their own life, don’t feel guilty. It is not always possible to prevent suicide.

Contact confidential helplines and sources of support - see next panel

Confidential helplines and sources of support

Samaritans
116 123
(24 hours, free to call)
www.samaritans.org

PAPYRUS: Prevention of Young Suicide
0800 068 41 41
(Mon–Fri 10am–10pm; weekends 2pm–10pm; bank hols 2pm–5pm)
www.papyrus-uk.org

CALM: Campaign Against Living Miserably
0800 58 58 58
(7 days a week, 5pm–midnight)
www.thecalmzone.net

SANE Mental Health Helpline
0300 304 7000
(7 days a week 4.30pm–10.30pm)
www.sane.org.uk

MIND
0300 123 3393
(Mon–Fri 9am–6pm)
www.mind.org.uk

Maytree: A sanctuary for the suicidal
020 7263 7070
www.maytree.org.uk

This leaflet was developed at the University of Exeter Medical School in collaboration with The Alliance of Suicide Prevention Charities (TASC, and was originally produced by Devon County Council.

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To order copies of this leaflet or to download a PDF, please visit: http://devon.cc/mentalhealth
Why it’s important to ask

If someone is suicidal, they are likely to be feeling:
• cut off from everyone around them
• frightened and ashamed about wanting to die
• desperate for help but afraid to ask.

They need someone to start the conversation for them. This shows them that they have permission to talk about it and that they don’t have to wrestle with their dark and terrible thoughts alone.

Some common fears:
“Won’t talking about suicide put the idea in her head?”
No. If a person is suicidal, the idea is already there. If they aren’t suicidal, it won’t do any harm.

“What if I say the wrong thing? It could damage our relationship.”
Showing a person you care about them won’t damage your relationship. Saying nothing could result in losing them forever.

What to say

It can be really scary starting this kind of conversation.

Step 1: Explore how they’re feeling
If something bad has happened to them, ask, “How has it made you feel?” They may shrug and say, “I’m OK.” If they don’t seem OK to you, keep trying, quietly and gently.

Listen attentively. Try to keep the dialogue open by asking questions like, “How bad is it?” or “What’s that like?”

Don’t deny what they’re telling you, and don’t pretend you know how they feel.

Step 2: Ask the ‘S’ question
If they give any indication that they’re feeling hopeless or can’t see the point in going on, ask clearly and calmly, “Are you having any thoughts of suicide?”

Don’t be too quick to accept denials or joking responses.

It’s important to trust your gut instincts. If something about the person doesn’t look or feel right, say something.

Saying something is safer than saying nothing.
Saying the word won’t make it happen.