

Yellow  
Brick  
Road



# How you can help prevent suicide

Supporting someone  
in suicidal distress

## Supporting someone in suicidal distress

We know that for the families we support, part of the journey can be significant suicidal distress. This is challenging for everyone involved, but there are things you can do to help.

Know that a person who is thinking about suicide might not ask for help but that doesn't mean that help is not wanted.

They might feel whakamā, ashamed, think they don't deserve help or that no one can help them.

People who are suicidal often feel that their whānau and friends would be better off without them.

Most people who feel suicidal don't want to die – they just want their pain to end and can't see another way out.

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

Keep in mind that you can only do what you are able to do. You cannot be completely responsible for another person's actions.

Work to help the person in distress build a larger support network of at least three people.



### What to do – The basics

**A = ASK. “Ask are you thinking of suicide?”**

Asking about suicide will not put the thought in their head. Tell them you are concerned and that you are there to help.

**E = ENSURE. Ensure their immediate safety (and your safety too).**

Remove any obvious means of suicide they might use (including car keys and items in the bathrooms). Stay with them until they are safe.

**I = IDENTIFY. Identify their problems.**

You don't need to offer any advice or solve any problems. Just stay calm and listen.

It's important to find out a few things:

- Have they already done anything to hurt themselves before talking to you?
- Do they have a plan to carry this through?
- What is the timing?
- What sort of access do they have to their planned method?

Answers to these questions tell you how much risk they are in right now.

**O = OFFER. Hope, help and support.**

Offer hope and remind them there are other ways to solve their problems.

**U = USE. Use professionals and community.**

Don't be sworn to secrecy. It's okay to tell a professional so you can keep them safe. If they are a young person, and you are not their parent, explain that the more support they have the better. Ask if they would like you to tell their parents for them.

## Warning signs and symptoms to look for

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 they may need support.

You might notice they:

- Tell you they want to die or kill themselves (this may be in a joking way).
- Tell you they feel like a burden and you would be better off without them.
- Access things they could use to hurt themselves.
- Read or write about suicide online, or post photos or videos about suicide.
- Become obsessed with death.
- Become isolated or withdrawn from family and friends.
- Don't seem to be coping with any problems they may be having.
- Have changes in mood or mood swings – becoming depressed, irritable, anxious or increased anger/rage.
- Have trouble concentrating and getting through a normal day as they could before.
- Hurt themselves – for example, cutting skin or taking an overdose.
- Start taking more risks, such as drinking more, taking more drugs, driving fast.
- Feel worthless, guilty, whakamā or ashamed, or have self-hating thoughts.
- Have no hope for the future, express hopelessness.

- Increasingly use drugs or alcohol to cope with difficult feelings or thoughts.
- Feel trapped, overwhelmed or in unbearable pain.
- 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, tell you they feel like “nothing matters”.
- Give away possessions, pay back debts or ‘tie up loose ends’, say “goodbye” to people.
- Stop taking their medication.
- Suddenly seem calm or happy after they have been depressed or suicidal.

**Look out for the following statements  
(possibly said jokingly):**

- “I should just kill myself.”
- “I’ve got no reason to live.”
- “I’d be better off dead.”
- “Everyone would be better off without me.”
- “There’s no way out of this.”
- “I don’t belong.”
- “I can’t live like this anymore.”
- “I can’t take this pain anymore.”

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 behaviour, trust your instincts and ask them directly if they are thinking about suicide.



## Dos and don'ts of suicide prevention

### Dos:

- Be aware. Learn the warning signs.
- Get involved.
- Be willing to listen.
- Be non-judgmental.
- Offer hope.
- Look after yourself during the process.

### Don'ts:

- Don't assume they want to die. With help, a person can be supported back towards wanting to live.
- Don't see it as "just a cry for help". If someone is in enough distress to attempt suicide, they need help.
- Don't debate whether suicide is right or wrong.
- Don't ask why.
- Don't act shocked.
- Don't lecture on the value of life.
- Don't think of the person as selfish.
- Don't dare him or her to do it.
- Don't laugh at them or shame them.
- Don't ignore them or tell them to snap out of it.
- Don't minimise their problems or compare them to other people's.
- Don't get angry at them.
- 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 leave them alone.

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

Instead, develop a plan together to support the person and identify how different people can help.



## Where to get help

Don't hesitate to get professional help if you need it or if you are concerned about your loved one's safety. You can talk to your local doctor, contact your community mental health team or reach out to a support service, such as:

Suicide Crisis Helpline: 0508 TAUTOKO (0508 82 88 65)

National Telehealth Service for mental illness and addiction: 1737  
(free call or text anytime)

24/7 Lifeline: 0800 LIFELINE (0800 54 33 54) or free text HELP (4357)

Kidsline: 0800 54 37 54

## How Yellow Brick Road can help you

Every day we set out to ensure whānau feel listened to, supported, equipped and ultimately confident to overcome the challenges they face.

If you are concerned about a whānau member experiencing suicidal distress, our support workers can help you by providing support, information, education and advocacy services, such as:

- Listening to your concerns and questions
- Creating an action plan to help your loved one throughout their recovery
- Completing a Safety Plan to help you and your loved one
- Providing books, articles and information about locally available services
- Support groups

Our services are free. Contact us today to find out more.



**It takes each of us to make  
a difference for all of us.**

**It's whānau ora, and it is the  
foundation that inspires every  
aspect of our work.**

Yellow Brick Road is a national organisation that specialises in providing support for whānau who have a loved one experiencing mental health challenges.

After 40 years of experience working with people around New Zealand, we know that if the family of a loved one experiencing mental distress are correctly supported and empowered, the path they walk leads to increased wellbeing for the whole whānau.

Positive change is our singular focus. By working together, we can help you thrive.



Supporting families  
towards mental wellbeing

Northern Region  
0800 732 825

Central North Island  
0800 555 434

South Island  
0800 876 682

[yellowbrickroad.org.nz](http://yellowbrickroad.org.nz)