

how to



cope with
suicidal feelings

How to cope with suicidal feelings

This booklet is for anyone experiencing suicidal feelings. It explains what suicidal feelings are, why you might feel that way, how you can help yourself cope right now, and in the long-term.

Getting help in an emergency

If you don't feel you can keep yourself safe right now, seek immediate help.

- **go to any hospital A&E** department (sometimes known as the emergency department)
- **call 999** and ask for an ambulance if you can't get to A&E
- ask someone else to contact 999 for you or take you to A&E immediately

If you need some support right now, but don't want to go to A&E, here are some other options for you to try:

- contact the Samaritans on freephone 116 123, they're open 24 hours and are there to listen
- contact your GP for an emergency appointment or the out of hours team
- call NHS 111 (England) or NHS Direct 0845 46 47 (Wales)
- contact your local crisis team
- see our page on helping yourself cope right now, and on crisis services.

Worried about someone else? See the Mind's booklet *How to support someone feeling suicidal*.

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What are suicidal feelings?

Suicide is the act of intentionally taking your own life.

Suicidal feelings can range from being preoccupied by abstract thoughts about ending your life, or feeling that people would be better off without you, to thinking about methods of suicide, or making clear plans to take your own life

If you are feeling suicidal, you might be scared or confused by these feelings. But you are not alone. Many people think about suicide at some point in their lifetime.

●● *I couldn't see past the pain. It was a different reality for me. I only knew I wanted the pain to stop, the anguish to go away.* ●●

What does it feel like to be suicidal?

Everyone's experience of suicidal feelings is unique to them. You might feel unable to cope with the enduring difficult feelings you are experiencing. You may feel less like you want to die and more like you cannot go on living the life you have.

These feelings may build over time or might fluctuate from moment to moment. And it's common to not understand why you feel this way. Here are some thoughts, feelings and experiences you may go through if you are feeling suicidal.

How you might think or feel:

- hopeless, like there is no point in living
- tearful and overwhelmed by negative thoughts
- unbearable pain that you can't imagine ending
- useless, unwanted or unneeded by others
- desperate, as if you have no other choice



-
- like everyone would be better off without you
 - cut off from your body or physically numb

What you may experience:

- poor sleep with early waking
- change in appetite, weight gain or loss
- no desire to take care of yourself, for example neglecting your physical appearance
- wanting to avoid others
- self-loathing and low self-esteem
- urges to self-harm

How long will I feel suicidal?

Suicidal feelings can be overwhelming. How long these feelings last differs for everyone. It is common to feel as if you'll never be happy or hopeful again. But with support and self-help, the majority of people who have felt suicidal go on to live fulfilling lives.

 *Suicidal thoughts aren't permanent - things do improve. You can find your motivation to live again.* 

The earlier you let someone know how you're feeling, the quicker you'll be able to get support to overcome these feelings. However, it can feel difficult to open up to people.

You may want others to understand what you're going through, but you might feel:

- unable to tell someone
- unsure of who to tell
- concerned that they won't understand
- fearful of being judged
- worried you'll upset them

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If this is the case, you might find it helpful to show our pages on supporting someone else with suicidal feelings to someone you trust. This can be a good way of starting the conversation and can give them suggestions of how they can help you.

It's important to remember that you deserve support, you are not alone and there is support out there.

👉👉 *Sharing that I felt suicidal with close friends, although scary as I worried they'd be angry, has helped me in subsequent black times. They said they'd hate to lose me having not been given the chance to help.* 👉👉

Why do I feel suicidal?

Suicidal feelings can affect anyone, of any age, gender or background, at any time. If you are feeling suicidal it is likely that you have been experiencing a growing sense of hopelessness and worthlessness for some time. You may not know what has caused you to feel this way but it is often a combination of factors.

👉👉 *The thoughts would completely consume you sometimes, feeling like you have no control over your own body.* 👉👉

Struggling to cope with certain difficulties in your life can cause you to feel suicidal, such as:

- mental health problems
- bullying or discrimination
- domestic abuse
- bereavement
- the end of a relationship
- long-term physical pain or illness
- adjusting to a big change, such as retirement or redundancy

- money problems or homelessness
- isolation or loneliness
- being in prison
- feeling inadequate or a failure
- losing a loved one to suicide
- addiction or substance abuse
- pregnancy, childbirth or postnatal depression
- cultural pressure, such as forced marriage
- doubts about your sexual or gender identity
- sexual or physical abuse

If you are unsure of why you feel suicidal, you may find it even harder to believe that there could be a solution. But whatever the reason there is support available to help you cope and overcome these feelings.

👉👉 *Whenever I feel suicidal thoughts starting to engulf me I keep reminding myself that feelings can change in an instant. Perhaps I'll wake up tomorrow and will no longer feel like I want to die – because that has happened many times before.* 👉👉

Can medication cause suicidal feelings?

Some medications, such as antidepressants have been found to cause suicidal feelings. This side effect is mainly associated with a type of antidepressant called selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) but all antidepressants carry this potential risk.

Young people under the age of 25 are particularly at risk. For further guidance please see our information on what you need to know before taking antidepressants. If you find you are experiencing suicidal feelings while taking antidepressants:

- contact your GP as soon as possible to discuss this
- if you feel at immediate risk go to your local hospital's A&E department



Why are some groups more at risk of suicide?

Research shows that men, and people who identify as LGBTQ are more at risk of taking their own life:

Men

It's not clear why more men than women complete suicide. However if you are male you may:

- feel pressured to 'get on with things' and keep your thoughts and feelings to yourself
- choose suicide methods that have a lower chance of survival
- believe you can or feel you have to cope without help
- worry that you will appear weak if you talk about your feelings or seek support.

Organisations such as the Campaign Against Living Miserably (CALM) are working to prevent male suicide in the UK by challenging the culture that  prevents men from seeking help when they need and by offering support to men in crisis via their helpline and webchat. See 'Useful contacts' p.19. 

LGBTQ

Studies show that people from LGBTQ communities are more likely to experience suicidal feelings and take their own lives. The reasons for this are complex and not yet fully understood. However, mental health problems experienced by LGBTQ people have been linked to:

- discrimination
- bullying
- homophobia, biphobia or transphobia

You might also experience rejection, negative reactions or hostility from family members, friends, strangers, employers or members of the religious community. This can have a big impact on your self-esteem and mean you

might feel unable to be open about your sexual or gender identity at work, at home or in the world at large.

Organisations such as Switchboard provide support and information to gay, lesbian, bi-sexual and trans people via their confidential helpline, instant messaging and email service. The Gender Trust support anyone affected by gender identity issues, and has a list of local support groups, and therapists who specialise in supporting people with gender identity issues. (See 'Useful contacts' on p.19.)

For further information, search 'LGBTQ mental health' on Mind's website.

Where can I get support?

If you are experiencing ongoing suicidal feelings, you might feel as if there's nothing that could help. But there is support to help you cope with the problems that may be causing you to feel suicidal.

Support through your GP

Going to your GP is a good starting point. It is common to feel worried about talking to your doctor about suicidal feelings, but they will be used to listening to people who are experiencing difficult feelings.

Your GP can:

- refer you to talking treatments
- prescribe you medication
- refer you to specialist services, such as a community mental health team

You might find it helpful to have a look at Mind's booklet *The Mind guide to seeking help for a mental health problem* for tips on how to prepare for your GP appointment.

👤👤 Always ask for help. Talking is hard but people can help us through the hard times. 👤👤

Talking treatments

Talking treatments involve speaking about your feelings with a trained professional, such as a counsellor or psychotherapist. This could help you understand why you're experiencing suicidal feelings, and think about ways you can help yourself cope with and resolve them.

There may be a long waiting list in your area to access talking treatments on the NHS, but you may be able to access them through charities, your workplace or university, or privately at a reduced rate.

See Mind's booklet *Making sense of talking treatments* for more information about different types of treatment, and how you can access them through the NHS and privately.

Medication

Although there isn't a specific drug licensed to treat suicidal feelings, your doctor might prescribe you psychiatric medication to help you cope with your symptoms, or to treat a mental health problem, which might be causing your suicidal feelings. These might include, antidepressants, antipsychotics or mood stabilisers

Crisis services

A crisis service is any service that is available at short notice to help you resolve a mental health crisis, or to support you while it is happening:

- Crisis resolution and home treatment (CRHT) teams who can support you at your home during a mental health crisis. See our page on crisis teams for more information.
- Community mental health teams (CMHT) who can support you at home when you are not in crisis.
- Crisis houses offer a sanctuary where you can go to reflect and talk to



others when you are experiencing suicidal feelings. Take a look at our page on crisis houses for more information and to find out what is available to you locally.

- Local support services which may offer day services, drop-in sessions, counselling or issue-specific support. Many local branches of the Samaritans offer walk in face-to-face support. See our page on day services for more information about how to find and access local support services.

Telephone support

Telephone services can be a good way of getting information or support when you need it. Many are available out-of-hours and provide a confidential, judgement-free service.

Talking to someone on the telephone can also be helpful if you are finding it difficult to open up to the people you know, or speak to someone face-to-face. Search 'telephone support' on Mind's website for a detailed list of organisations you can contact.

 *I've saved the Samaritans number so I know there is always a place to talk.* 

Peer support

Peer support brings together people who've had similar experiences to support each other. You can share your thoughts and tips for coping with others who understand what you are going through. For more information, and to find peer support services near you, see Mind's online guide to peer support or contact your local Mind.

Peer support is also available online. You might prefer this if you don't feel like you can talk to people on the telephone or face to face.

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- Big White Wall offers support from trained professionals as well as peer support from other people experiencing mental health problems. For many areas across the UK the site is free to access, although in some cases you might need a referral from your GP to use the service.
- Mind runs Elefriends, a supportive online community.

See Mind's online guide to online support for more information.

How can I help myself cope right now?

You might be feeling so upset, angry and in pain that you believe that these feelings will never end. But it's important to remember that they cannot and will not last. Like all feelings, these will pass.

There are steps you can take right now to stop yourself from acting on your suicidal thoughts. Everyone is different, so it's about finding what works best for you. Here are some practical tips that other people have found helpful when they've felt suicidal.

Get safe right now

- Get through the next 5 minutes. Taking things minute by minute can help make things more bearable. The lifeline for attempt survivors website has 100 tips for getting through the next 5 minutes (see 'Useful contacts' on p.19). Reward yourself for each 5 minutes that pass.
- Remove anything you could use to harm yourself or ask someone else to remove these for you. If you're in an unsafe location, move away.
- If you have a safety plan or crisis plan, follow it.
- Tell someone how you're feeling. Whether it's a friend, family member or even a pet, telling someone else how you are feeling can help you to feel less alone and more in control.

●● *When it got really bad and the temptation to harm myself was really bad I would get my family to hide dangerous things away and go to bed.* ●●

Distract yourself

- If you're thinking of harming yourself, find self-harm coping techniques that work for you, such as:
 - holding an ice cube in your hand until it melts and focus on how cold it feels
 - tearing something up into hundreds of pieces
 - take a very cold shower or bath. Search 'self-harm' on Mind's website for more information on coping with self-harm.
- Focus on your senses. Taking time to think about what you can smell, taste, touch, hear and see can help to ground your thoughts.
- Steady your breathing. Take long deep breaths; breathing out for longer than you breathe in can help you to feel calmer.
- Look after your needs. Avoid taking drugs or drinking alcohol as this can make you feel worse. If you can: get a glass of water, eat something if you're hungry, sit somewhere comfortable and write down how you're feeling.
- Get outside. If you are feeling numb, feeling the rain, sun or wind against your skin can help you to feel more connected to your body.
- Reach out. If you can't talk to someone you know, contact a telephone support service or use online peer support such as Elefriends.

●● *Sometimes it's just about survival and focusing on something that's real until the feelings can become easier to deal with.* ●●

Challenge your thoughts

- **Make a deal with yourself that you won't act today.** Plan to get support if you're not getting support already (see 'What support can I get?' on p.19).

- **Find your reasons to live.** You may feel like the world will be better off without you or there's no point in living, but this is never the case. You could:
 - write down what you're looking forward to, whether it's eating your favourite meal, seeing a loved one or catching up on the next episode of a TV show.
 - make plans to do something you enjoy tomorrow or in the near future. Plans don't have to be big or expensive.
 - think about the people you love. No matter how bad you're feeling, it's important to remember that these people would miss you.
- **Be kind to yourself.** Talk to yourself as if you were talking to a good friend. Do whatever you think might help you to get past these thoughts. It could be something small like having a bath, wrapping yourself in a blanket and watching your favourite film. These ideas may seem silly but it can be easy to forget to do something nice for yourself.
- **Tell yourself you can get through this.** At times, we can concentrate on the negatives we tell ourselves and lose hope. Repeating to yourself that you can get past these feelings can help you regain hope and focus on getting through it.

👉👉 *Rather than focus on all the desperate negative thoughts about being a burden and of no use, bring your focus into trying to believe it will not last forever and working out how you can safely get through.* 👉👉

How can I help myself cope in the future?



If you have experienced suicidal feelings in the past, or are still feeling low now, you may be worried that these feelings might return or get worse. But there are steps you can take to look after and improve your general wellbeing when you're feeling low, as well as prepare for if you were to feel suicidal again.

Make a safety plan

A safety plan is a personalised plan to support you step-by-step at times when you may be thinking about suicide. Your safety plan might include: recognising your warning signs

- details of your own coping strategies – what has helped in the past and what you can do to help yourself now
- the names and contact details of loved ones or telephone support services who can help in a crisis
- the names and contact details of professionals or agencies you can contact during crisis
- steps on making your environment safe and details of a safe place you can go to if you need

Try to make a plan when you are well or able to think clearly about what you find helpful. You might want to complete the plan with a trusted friend or therapist and give them a copy to keep.

 *I tried to plan for feeling really bad, knowing that I could become incapable of controlling my feelings for a while. It hurts to not trust yourself but it does pass and I'm so glad to be here still.* 

You can find safety plan templates online, for example from the Students Against Depression website or the Royal College of Psychiatrists. (See 'Useful contacts' on p.19.)

Is a safety plan the same as a crisis plan?

A safety plan focuses on what you can do now to keep yourself safe. A crisis plan or joint crisis plan (agreed jointly between you and any mental health professionals as part of your care programme approach) also focuses on what has helped to keep you safe in the past, but is more detailed. It also covers what treatment you would like to receive if necessary, and whether you've made an advance statement or decision.

Learn to manage difficult feelings

- **Take each day at a time.** There might be good days and bad days. Try to focus on each day at a time and set yourself small, achievable goals.
- **Develop coping strategies that work for you.** Self-help resources, such as Mood Juice, can help you to work through difficult feelings and learn coping skills.
- **Allow yourself to feel your feelings.** Suppressing your feelings when they happen can cause them to build up over time and make them even harder to cope with. Think about what caused you to feel suicidal and share this with those supporting you.
- **Make a happy box.** Fill a box with memories and items that can provide comfort and help lift your mood when you feel down. The box can contain anything that is meaningful and helpful to you, for example: a favourite book, positive quotes, photos, letters, poems, notes to yourself, a cuddly toy, a perfume or smell important to you.
- **Learn your triggers.** Keeping a diary can help you to find patterns in your mood over time and help you to think about what might be causing you to feel suicidal. You can track your feelings by using an online mood diary, such as Mood Panda (see 'Useful contacts' on p.19).
- **Don't blame yourself.** Many people who have tried or thought about taking their life feel guilty afterwards, especially if they have worried loved ones. Try to accept that was just how you were feeling at the time, and focus your energy now on looking after yourself.

Value yourself

- **Write a letter to yourself.** Include happy memories and mention the people who love and care about you. This can be helpful to read when you are experiencing suicidal feelings to remind yourself that things can get better.
- **Make plans to look forward to.** It doesn't have to be something

big like a holiday but scheduling time with loved ones, booking tickets to a music or art event or joining a club can help you to feel more positive about the future.

- **Build your self-esteem.** Search 'self-esteem' on Mind's website for more information.
- **Celebrate yourself.** Write down your achievements and the things you like about yourself, however small. If someone compliments you, make a note of it.
- **Do things just for yourself.** Whether it's spending half an hour reading a book, doing a hobby or taking up a new one, try to regularly make time to do the things you enjoy.

Connect to other people

- **Seek support.** If you're not already receiving support or don't feel the support you have is helpful, take a look at our page on support for suicidal feelings.
- **Let others know how you're feeling.** Tell people what you find helpful and let them know when you are finding things difficult. It's okay to ask others to be with you if you need them.
- **Volunteer.** Giving your time to help others can be rewarding. It can build confidence and help remind you that you are appreciated and needed by others.
- **Try peer support.** It can be helpful to talk with others who have experienced suicidal feelings. Contact your local Mind to find what peer services are available locally. You can also access peer support online, on websites like Elefriends.

●● *Being suicidal is nothing short of a nightmare so it is essential that you tell someone.* ●●

Look after your wellbeing

- **Get enough sleep.** Learn to relax before bed, making sure your

bedroom is a calm place clear of distractions. If you are having trouble sleeping, search 'sleep problems' on Mind's website for more information.

- **Avoid drugs and alcohol.** Stopping or reducing your use of drugs and/or alcohol will help you feel more in control of your thoughts, and make it easier to rationalise your feelings. Search 'street drugs' or 'alcohol' on Mind's website for more information.
- **Eat well.** Eating regular healthy meals can make a big difference to your overall sense of wellbeing. Search 'food and mood' on Mind's website for more information.

Useful contacts

Mind

Mind Infoline: 0300 123 3393
 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 6pm)
 email: info@mind.org.uk
 text: 86463
 web: mind.org.uk
 Details of local Minds, other local services and Mind's Legal Line. Language Line is available for languages other than English.

Big White Wall

web: bigwhitewall.com

Online community for adults experiencing emotional or psychological distress. It is free to use in many areas if you live in the UK.

CALM (Campaign against living miserably)

web: thecalmzone.net
 tel: 0800 58 58 58

Provides listening services, information and support for men at risk of suicide.

Elefriends

web: elefriends.org.uk

A safe, supportive online community where you can listen, be heard and share your experiences with others.

The Gender Trust

web: gendertrust.org.uk

Support for anyone affected by gender identity issues, with a list of local support groups and therapists who specialise in supporting people with gender identity issues.

Mood Panda

web: moodpanda.com

A free online mood diary.

Mood Juice

web: moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk

Online self-help guides on topics such as depression, anxiety and stress.

NHS Direct/111

England: 111
 Wales: 0845 46 47

Non-emergency medical help and advice for people living in England and Wales.

Royal College of Psychiatrists

rcpsych.ac.uk

Mental health information and resources.

Samaritans

web: samaritans.org

tel: 116 123 (freephone)

email: jo@samaritans.org

Freepost RSRB-KKBY-CYJK

Chris PO Box 90 90

Stirling FK8 2SA

24-hour emotional support for anyone struggling to cope.

Students Against Depression

web: studentsagainstdepression.org

Information and support for students experiencing suicidal feelings. They also have a helpful safety plan template.

Switchboard

web: switchboard.lgbt

tel: 0300 330 0630

LGBTQ+ helpline providing listening services, information and support for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities.

Further information

Mind offers a range of mental health information on:

- diagnoses
- treatments
- practical help for wellbeing
- mental health legislation
- where to get help

To read or print Mind's information booklets for free, visit mind.org.uk or contact Mind Infoline on 0300 123 3393 or at info@mind.org.uk

To buy copies of Mind's information booklets, visit mind.org.uk/shop or phone 0844 448 4448 or email publications@mind.org.uk

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References available on request
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Providing information costs money. We really value donations, which enable us to get our information to more people who need it.

Just £5 could help another 15 people in need receive essential practical information.

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email: dons@mind.org.uk
web: mind.org.uk/donate

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fax: 020 8522 1725
web: mind.org.uk

Mind

We're Mind, the mental health charity for England and Wales. We believe no one should have to face a mental health problem alone. We're here for you. Today. Now. We're on your doorstep, on the end of a phone or online. Whether you're stressed, depressed or in crisis. We'll listen, give you advice, support and fight your corner. And we'll push for a better deal and respect for everyone experiencing a mental health problem.

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