

NOT JUST

A 'CRY FOR HELP'

This booklet is for you if you know someone who has made a suicide attempt.

It gives some guidance on how you can help him or her through this crisis, and offers some information about organisations that can *help you to help them*.

Knowing that someone we care about is feeling suicidal can be emotionally and physically draining. It is important to look after your own health and to make time to get support and advice for yourself too.

You are not alone

Attempted suicide is far more common than most of us realise. In England and Wales, more than 140,000 people are admitted to accident and emergency departments each year because they have tried to kill themselves.

Although most people who attempt suicide survive, a few remain at high risk of taking their own life for quite some time afterwards. This means that **any** suicide attempt, however minor it seems to be, should be taken seriously.

Why did it happen ?

Thinking about suicide

Suicidal thoughts can coincide with times of change - whether these changes are 'good' (like getting married or starting a new job), or 'bad' (such as someone dying or the end of a relationship). Quite often two or three different things will have happened, each of them causing considerable stress.

For some people there may be no apparent reason for these thoughts.

The circumstances leading up to a suicide attempt are different for everybody, and the reasons for it happening may never be fully explained or understood.

Often those who think about suicide are depressed. Usually very sensitive people, they may have been in despair, feeling hopeless about the future and unable to think straight. Everyday worries have become totally out of proportion, and black thoughts may have left no room for anyone or anything else.

Acting on the thought

Turning thoughts about suicide into action is sometimes done on impulse, perhaps following an event that is seen as 'the last straw'. This is especially true of young people.

Others, however, may have been making plans about suicide for some time.

Using alcohol and/or other drugs can make things worse. They take away the inhibitions which would otherwise stop someone from attempting to take their own life.

It's hard to talk...

about fears and feelings - even to those we know love and care about us. This can prevent other people from recognising the distress and being able to help in a crisis.

Words are often totally inadequate to convey the amount of pain a person may be suffering.

It is easy to understand that someone is hurting if they have been badly injured or are physically ill. Emotional pain cannot be seen, but it can be just as unbearable.

Sometimes attempting suicide may be the only way to show other people how bad things are.

*'When your back is up against the wall,
suicide can seem to be the only way out.'*

What can be done to help ?

Do keep 'ALERT'

A*sk them how they were feeling before it happened and how they are feeling now.* Talking about suicide does not make it more likely to happen. Try to be patient if they are angry or refuse to talk. It may be that writing things down is an easier way for them to communicate with you.

L*isten - **this is the most important thing you can do.*** Treat them with respect, and try not to be judgmental or critical.

E*mpathise by showing that *you really are trying to understand* things from their point of view. Words don't always matter. The touch of a hand or a hug can go a long way to show that you care.*

R*eassure them that desperate feelings are very common and can be overcome. Things can and do change, help can be found and there is hope for the future. People **do** get better !*

T*ry to give practical support, and help them to cope with any extra pressures. It may not be possible to deal with all the things that are troubling them, but between you agree on what you will do if a suicidal crisis happens again.*

...and **DON'T**.....

Put them down or do things that might make them feel worse. A suicide attempt suggests that self-esteem is already very low.

Abandon or reject them in any way. Your help, support and attention are vital if they are to begin to feel that life is worth living again. Don't relax your attentions just because they seem to be better. It doesn't mean that life is back to normal for them yet. They may be at risk for quite a while.

Nag - although it may be well meant. Nobody wants to be pestered all the time. Don't intrude - try to balance being watchful with a respect for privacy.

Ignore what has happened.

Criticise their actions - however you may be feeling about their suicide attempt, try to remember the pain and turmoil that they were, and may still be, going through. Don't take their behaviour personally - it was not necessarily directed at you.

Help from services

There are many ways in which health workers, social services staff and others can help someone who has attempted suicide. The staff in the hospital accident and emergency department may make a referral, or the family doctor can be asked to.

Treating depression: suicidal feelings may be linked to being depressed. Depression is a serious illness but can be successfully treated by anti-depressant medication and/or 'talking and listening treatments'. Further information about depression and its treatment can be obtained from Depression Alliance.
(see last page for contact details)

Extra help in a crisis

If you feel that the situation is getting worse rather than better, and you are worried about another suicide attempt, trust your instinct and share your concerns straight away. Contact the family doctor, or any professional who has been involved already.

These people cannot discuss confidential details with you, **but they will want to listen to what you are saying and they can follow it up.**

Further information and help:

Saneline: is a national, out-of-hours telephone help-line for anyone coping with mental illness, whose lines are open from 12 noon to 2 am every day of the year.

Its services include:

- offering emotional support and reassurance during periods of crisis,
- giving information from their extensive database on local and national services and
- discussing symptoms of illnesses and treatments available from medication to psychotherapy and counselling.

Phone: 0845 767 8000 (local call rate)

Depression Alliance:

can give more information about depression and its treatment.

Their national office is at 35 Westminster Bridge Road,
London. SE1 7JB

Phone: 020 7633 0557

From October 2000 an information help-line will enable people to receive support, advice and understanding from trained volunteer counsellors.

Website: www.depressionalliance.org/

YoungMinds Parents' Information Service:

is a telephone service providing information and advice for anyone with concerns about the mental health of a child or young person.

Callers who need in-depth advice can be offered a further free telephone consultation with one of the service's team of professional mental health specialists. The helpline is open at the following times:

Monday & Friday: 10am - 1pm; Tuesday to Thursday: 1pm - 4pm.

Phone: 0800 018 2138 (freephone)

Website: www.youngminds.org.uk/

Samaritans: a 24 hour service providing confidential emotional support. You can contact Samaritans by phone, e-mail, letter or visit.

Phone: 08457 909090 (local call rate)

Website: www.samaritans.org

Or write to: The Upper Mill, Kingston Road, Ewell, Surrey KT17 2AF

PAPYRUS : can send you a list of useful contacts and literature.

Phone: 01706 214449

e-mail: sendinfo1@papyrus-uk.org

Or write to: PAPHYRUS, Rossendale GH, Union Road,
RAWTENSTALL. Lancs. BB4 6NE

Your comments about this booklet are welcomed:
please contact PAPHYRUS at the above address.

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