

10 Steps to Safety

Step 1: Secure the Environment

- Isolate the person from additional tension and anyone or anything that seems to be provoking him or her.
- Contain the person within a specific area.
- Don't leave the person alone.
- Reduce the stimuli in the area around the person.
- Do whatever can be done to reduce the level of pain the person is in.
- Fulfill requests for physical things such as food, water, etc.
- Establish privacy.
- Take time to arrange whatever makes the person feel more comfortable.
- Slow down the person's thoughts and behaviors to buy time. Time helps to gradually reduce the threat level in most suicide situations.

Step 2: Develop Trust

- Introduce yourself if the person does not already know you.
- Let him or her know you are trying to help.
- Let the person know you take his or her threat seriously.
- Get on the same eye level with the person.
- Listen very carefully.
- Answer questions if you can.
- Respond with appropriate comments, such as: "I can see how this situation is distressing to you."

These questions are important in the risk-assessment step:

- Are you suicidal now?
- On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 = low chance; 10 = high chance), what is the chance you will kill yourself?
- How do you plan to kill yourself?
- Do you have the means to kill yourself?
- Do you know anyone who has killed him- or herself? Were you related to that person?
- Have you ever tried to kill yourself? How serious was that attempt?
- What has kept you alive up to now?
- What will happen in your future?

Step 4: Develop a Greater Understanding


- Ask questions about what led to the current crisis.
- Listen carefully.
- Focus on the "life" side of the person's ambivalence.
- Offer support, understanding and encouragement.

Step 5: Focus on the Main Problem

- If there is more than one big issue, take each one individually.
- Don't rush the discussion.
- Recognize that the person is in crisis and in pain.

Step 6: Discuss Alternatives

- Keep in mind the suicidal person may have very rigid thinking and may not be able to see any alternatives.
- Work together to develop a list of possible solutions.
- Be flexible and optimistic.
- Don't lie or promise anything that you can't guarantee.



Step 7: Pick the Best Option

- From the list of possible solutions, pick what appears to be the best option with the greatest chance of success.

Step 8: Develop an Action Plan

- Develop a practical plan with specific steps.
- The person must be willing to participate in the plan.
- Things that were successful for the person in previous crisis situations may be helpful now.
- Obtain the help of family members, friends, etc.

Step 9: Implement the Action Plan

- Get the plan started immediately.
- Help the person to help him- or herself. You may have to do some things for the person (e.g., make phone calls, arrange resources, provide transportation).

Step 10: Get a Referral for Further Evaluation

- Get immediate referral to a hospital or some other protective environment. (This is especially important if a suicide attempt has already taken place.)



QuickTip

Resources for people considering suicide:

- Physicians
- School counselors
- Mental health professionals
- Clergy
- Psychiatric hospitals
- Veterans centers
- Police

For people with a plan or who have made attempts:

- **911**
- Emergency departments
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: **800-273-TALK (8255)**, Veterans press 1