Dear Alice,

What do you do if you feel suicidal and don't have anyone to tell?

Answer

Dear Reader,

Having thoughts of suicide may be scary and overwhelming but you aren't alone. Many people have dealt with suicidal feelings at various times in their lives, and asking for help is a major step forward. If in crisis, it's recommended to seek support right away. In the event that you aren't able to ask a friend or family member for help, you could try contacting a mental health professional or calling the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline [2] (1-800-273-8255), which offers free, confidential support at any time of day. It's okay if you're unsure how to begin the conversation. One option is simply saying "I need help." The crisis worker you speak to can take it from there.

Here are some immediate steps to take if you're having thoughts of suicide:

- **Try creating space between your thoughts and any action.** Having thoughts of suicide don’t have to lead to suicide completion. Experts urge people having thoughts of suicide to wait. Try creating space between your thoughts and any action. One way to do this may be to make a promise to yourself that you won’t act for a set period of time (for example, that day or week).

- **Try to minimize drug and alcohol use.** Consider abstaining from drugs and alcohol, as they may strengthen thoughts of suicide.

- **Try to reduce access to means of harm.** Remove potentially lethal means such as prescription or nonprescription drugs, knives, razors, or guns from your home. If you can’t, consider going to a different, location, where you feel safe. Or, if overdosing is a possibility, have a person you trust store and help you regulate the use of any prescribed medicine.

- **Share your suicidal thoughts with others.** Letting someone know about your thoughts, such as a family member, friend, mentor, mental health professional, health care provider, professor, coach, or a person in your spiritual community can be helpful so they can provide some support.

- **Try to remember that others have experienced this, too.** Many people have
experienced thoughts of suicide and have gone on to have fulfilling lives. With time, this might be a possibility for you, too.

Adapted from HelpGuide [3].

Once you've taken some immediate action, it may be helpful to try to get connected with some mental health resources. If you're a student, you could try contacting your school's mental health services to get connected with a provider. Even if it's beyond typical office hours, your school may have an after-hours service that could provide assistance. If you have health insurance, another option is contacting your health insurance company to get a list of providers covered under your plan. A health care provider may also be able to recommend a mental health professional to you. The Q&A Finding low-cost counseling [4] provides more information about how to access counseling services for low or no fees. Lastly, along with The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, other helpful resources for suicide prevention include Befrienders International [5], American Association of Suicidology [6], and Suicide Awareness/Voices of Education [7].

Having suicidal thoughts may indicate that your life seems unbearable, and that the pain you're experiencing might feel all-consuming and never-ending. However, know that the intensity of your current emotional suffering may pass with time. In-the-moment feelings of hopelessness and depression might distort your decision making process, along with your understanding of yourself and the world around you. For this reason, when in a state of extreme distress, experts urge individuals to not make the call to end their lives. If you choose to keep living, you may have the chance to experience positive feelings and events in the future.

Once you are no longer in distress, you may want to think about long-term ways to reduce thoughts of suicide and improve your quality of life. HelpGuide provides some recommendations:

- **Identify what may cause the suicidal feelings.** Common events leading to suicidal thoughts are anniversaries of loss, alcohol and drugs use, and relationship stress.
- **Practice self-care.** Recommendations include eating and sleeping well, being active, and getting outside. It could be helpful to try doing some activities that make you feel more relaxed and balanced.
- **Identify the people who can support you.** Being mindful of spending time with people who lift you up and support you can help to increase positive feelings. This includes spending time with them in person.
- **Find activities or interests that excite you and make you happy.** Consider participating in activities that feel meaningful to you, and if possible, avoid spending time on activities that make you feel worse.
- **Practice stress management strategies to cope.** Being physically active, meditating, engaging in relaxation strategies (such as breathing exercises), and working to reframe negative thoughts are potential options.
- **Develop a daily routine.** If you don't have one, you might consider creating a daily routine and stick to it to give your life some more structure.
- **Create a safety plan.** Determining a plan to address suicidal thoughts if they return make help you take steps to mitigate them and seek care.

Talking to a mental health professional or another person in your support system may help you
better understand and manage your current and any future suicidal thoughts and feelings. Thank you for your courageous submission. Wishing you the best as you work towards seeking the help you deserve.

Alice!
Category:
Emotional Health
Suicide

Related questions

Friend is depressed — How to help?  
Social support  
Self-harm

Resources

Counseling and Psychological Services (CPS) (Morningside)  
Mental Health Services (CUIMC)  
Published date:  
Dec 30, 1969
Last reviewed on:  
Oct 11, 2019

Source URL: https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/feeling-suicidal-help-0

Go Ask Alice! is not an emergency or instant response service.

If you are in an urgent situation, please visit our Emergency page to view a list of 24 hour support services and hotlines.