

RECOGNISING AND RESPONDING TO SUICIDALITY DURING COVID-19 ISOLATION

Feeling down or anxious is normal during times of uncertainty. For some people, these sorts of events can quickly become overwhelming. The impacts of COVID-19 have been significant, and have left many people socially isolated, unemployed, without accommodation, sick or having to care for someone that is unwell. These changes can be particularly overwhelming for people who are experiencing alcohol and/or other drug problems, or their family and friends who are supporting them. People experiencing these challenges may find it difficult to feel positive about the future and might even consider taking their own life. Through difficult times, it is important for us to find ways to connect and support each other. This factsheet will help you identify warning signs and offer tips for what you can do if you or a loved one are at risk of suicide.

If you, or a loved one, are in need of immediate support, please contact Lifeline on **13 11 14**



SIGNS OF SUICIDALITY

Sometimes there are warning signs that someone is feeling suicidal. These might be easier to recognise when you are face-to-face with the person, but there are still some ways that these signs can be identified in text, phone or video call. We've listed some warning signs below and how they might look from a distance.

i Note: The signs that are extra important to pay attention to are highlighted in orange

SIGNS OF SUICIDALITY

SOCIAL WITHDRAWAL

Difficult to contact over the phone or via messages, disappear from social media, say they just want to be alone.

A PERSISTENT DROP IN MOOD

Talk less or at a much slower pace, texts may become shorter. Look down a lot, seem disengaged, have poor eye contact.

POOR SELF-CARE

Not changing out of pyjamas and into day clothes at all, putting less effort into their hygiene and appearance.

SELF-HARM

Marks on their body or covering themselves up in long sleeves, even when the temperature is quite warm.

INSOMNIA

Answer texts or active on social media in the early hours of the morning.

Note: some of these signs indicate other issues like anxiety so be aware, but no alarmed by them

FEELING HOPELESS

Feeling hopeless, like they're a burden, worthless or alone

Saying things like "I'm no good to anyone" or "everyone's so stressed about COVID, no one will notice I'm gone".

TALKING ABOUT THEIR DEATH OR WANTING TO DIE AND EVEN MAKING PLANS

Saying things like "I just want to end it all", or "I can't take it anymore".

BEING DISTRACTED

Struggling to focus whilst talking to you, not responding to texts, looking away frequently or seem to be staring into space.

ALCOHOL AND/OR OTHER DRUG USE

Telling you what they have drunk or consumed, always having a glass/can of alcohol in hand.

MAKING PREPARATIONS

Putting affairs in order or saying goodbye to people; they might start to gift or sell possessions, they might organise care for their pets

QUITTING WHAT'S IMPORTANT TO THEM

And saying things like "what's the point?"

i Note: For those of us supporting loved ones who have pre-existing alcohol and/or other drugs issues, the signs of suicidality may be more difficult to recognise or differentiate. One indicator may be a rapid increase in the amount of alcohol or other drugs they are using or how often they are using. For a full list of signs, please visit the Suicide Call Back Service by [clicking here](#).

REGIONAL, RURAL AND REMOTE AUSTRALIANS:



Australians living in regional, rural and remote areas may be experiencing isolation and difficulty in accessing services and social supports. If you are living in a regional, rural or remote area and recognise some of the warning signs for suicide in yourself, or the person you are supporting, remember – help is available.

A range of digital support services have been developed so that people living rural and remote areas have access to the support they need during COVID-19. For more information on how to access these available supports go to:

<https://headtohealth.gov.au/>

It is also important to remember that rates of COVID-19 are generally lower in regional, rural and remote areas of Australia. It may be possible to seek face-to-face support depending on services available or restrictions in your state. Click here for information about restrictions in your area.

HAVING A CONVERSATION ABOUT SUICIDE

Having a conversation about suicide will not make a person more likely to attempt it. In fact, having a conversation could save a life. The key things to remember are to listen, show you care, and offer support; or, seek help for yourself if you need it. Here are some tips for having the conversation:

- **Talk in a space that is quiet, distraction-free and relatively private.** Be mindful of who else is around you and where they are. These can be sensitive and sometimes confronting conversations.
- **Be open, sincere and direct.** Try to stay calm and refrain from judging or guiltting the person you are talking to, or telling them what to do.
- **Try to avoid statements starting with “you should” or “you need to”.** Instead, try saying “I’ve noticed” or “it seems like”. This shows that you’ve noticed this person’s behaviour has changed and that you’re concerned for them.



Photo by Matilda Wormwood from Pexels

There are also some specific things to be mindful of when talking to someone about suicide online or over the phone.



ONLINE

If someone posts something in a public space, be sure to contact them privately. It's good to ask them if they're okay, but it's best to do this in a private setting.

If it's someone you don't know very well, introduce yourself and let them know what has made you concerned.



OVER THE PHONE

Listen closely to their tone of voice, volume, rate of speech and any silences that occur.

Be direct, say "you seem to have gone quiet, are you okay?".

Be mindful of your own speech. You may need to use more 'verbal encouragers' or words like "mmm", "yeah" and "okay" to reassure the person that you are still listening (and that the connection hasn't dropped out).



VIA VIDEO

Try to look at the camera (not your screen) to convey eye contact. You can even remove the image of yourself if you find it distracting.

Use nonverbal cues like head nodding and smiling. Try leaning towards the camera or making obvious facial expressions to show that you are hearing them (and that your screen hasn't frozen).

It's also important to pay attention to what mutual friends and family are saying about the person you are concerned about. Consider saying something like "I haven't spoken to Amy in a few days, have you?" or "Amy seems a bit down, have you noticed this too?". It's good to have other people aware of their situation (with their permission) so you can better support them. Plus, you might also need to lean on these people for support yourself.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE CONVERSATION STOPS?

If they suddenly go offline it may just be that the connection has dropped out. To be sure, try the following:

- Call them back or try a different mode of communication e.g. video, phone call, text, messenger or other apps.
- Visit them yourself or send someone that lives closer to them (if you live too far away).
- **Call 000 and ask for a welfare check if you are highly concerned.**

Ideally, encourage them to think about who they want support from so that if you need to ask someone else to check-in on them, it's someone that they trust. To send help, you will need to know their location, so if their whereabouts is unknown or seems unfamiliar to you, ask them directly or try and ask a question early in the conversation, like "that place looks new, where are you at?".

CHECK-IN REGULARLY

Consider organising a time each day that you'll check in with each other. Even if it's just a text saying "I haven't heard from you - I'm worried about you." Continued contact can be an important way for them to feel cared for. It also provides you with reassurance that they are okay.

It's even more important to check-in regularly with someone who:

- Is living alone
- Is known to experience bouts of depression
- Has previously expressed suicidal thoughts or has attempted suicide before

ENCOURAGE THEM TO SEEK HELP

For someone experiencing suicidal thoughts, the sooner they have contact with a professional, the better. This can help to break the cycle of suicidal thinking. Encourage, but don't hassle them – it's still their choice. You can support them by:

- Offering to help them find a health professional
- Helping to book appointments or accompanying them to their appointments if they wish


GET HELP YOURSELF

Consider talking to someone else who is concerned for the person, someone outside the situation or to a professional. For more information on how to get support for yourself, visit the Suicide Call Back Service website by [clicking here](#).

IF THIS HAS RAISED ANY CONCERNS, PLEASE CONTACT ONE OF THE SERVICES BELOW:


This factsheet has included a list of services and resources to support you. Seek professional help if you are feeling overwhelmed or as though you cannot cope.

Lifeline

 13 11 14

 www.lifeline.org.au

National Alcohol and Other Drug Information Service

 1800 250 015

For more evidence-based information, resources and links to support services relating to crystal methamphetamine please visit Cracks in the Ice. The Family and Friends Support Program also provides more information/resources and support for families concerned about a loved ones AOD use.

FOR MORE INFORMATION AND SUPPORT SERVICES VISIT CRACKS IN THE ICE AND/OR THE FAMILY AND FRIENDS SUPPORT PROGRAM