

THIS WAY UP ↑↑

Helping You Take Care of Your Mental Health

Keep Calm, Stay Safe

What to do when you're feeling suicidal



Thinking about harming yourself or taking your own life? Read on!

Hi there, it is great that you're reading this! Why? Because you said that you've seriously thought about hurting yourself and taking your own life, but as you are reading this, it means you haven't given up hope.



Feeling like you'd be better off dead is awful. There are many different reasons why you could be having these thoughts:

- You're experiencing symptoms of depression
- You've had a traumatic experience
- You're faced with a really difficult problem, which you're unsure how to solve
- You're feeling isolated and alone
- You've lost something or someone you deeply care about
- Other: _____

Whatever the reason, the most important thing to know right now is that **there are things you can do to change how you are feeling for the better!**

Suicidal thoughts are really common. About 190,000 Australians have felt like you are feeling at some point in their life. Having suicidal thoughts isn't a sign of weakness, but a signal that it's time to get some help to tackle some of the problems you are currently facing.

Sometimes, people can be trying their hardest to solve these problems on their own, but just like you can't use a hammer to tighten a bolt, sometimes **you simply need specific tools to help you start feeling better and get on top of your difficulties.** And the good news is that you can equip yourself with some helpful tools and strategies, by getting some psychological support.

Did you know?

Having symptoms of depression is one of the most common reasons for having suicidal thoughts. Depression symptoms include:

- Feeling really down most of the time
- Not enjoying things you used to enjoy
- Difficulties concentrating and getting tasks done
- Having bad sleep
- Feeling worthless

When you have felt like this for some time, it can become understandably harder to imagine that your life could get better. This is why it is so important to tackle depression head on and learn practical skills to change your life for the better. You can get help from your GP, a psychologist, or a counsellor, and you can complete one of our online self-help programs.

Suicidal thoughts will not hurt you unless you act on them. Planning suicide and then attempting to carry out the plan is the only action that you can take that will make things worse and there are so many things you can try instead. We have put together a few suggestions in this handout to get you started, and we have created a comprehensive treatment program in our [Depression Course](#) which you can start right away.

We do hope that you find this guide helpful and we look forward to having you enrol in one of our courses!

1. GET CONTROL OF YOUR THOUGHTS SO THEY LOSE CONTROL OVER YOU.

The thing about thoughts is that they are simply something your mind generates, and are not necessarily true, correct, or representative of reality.

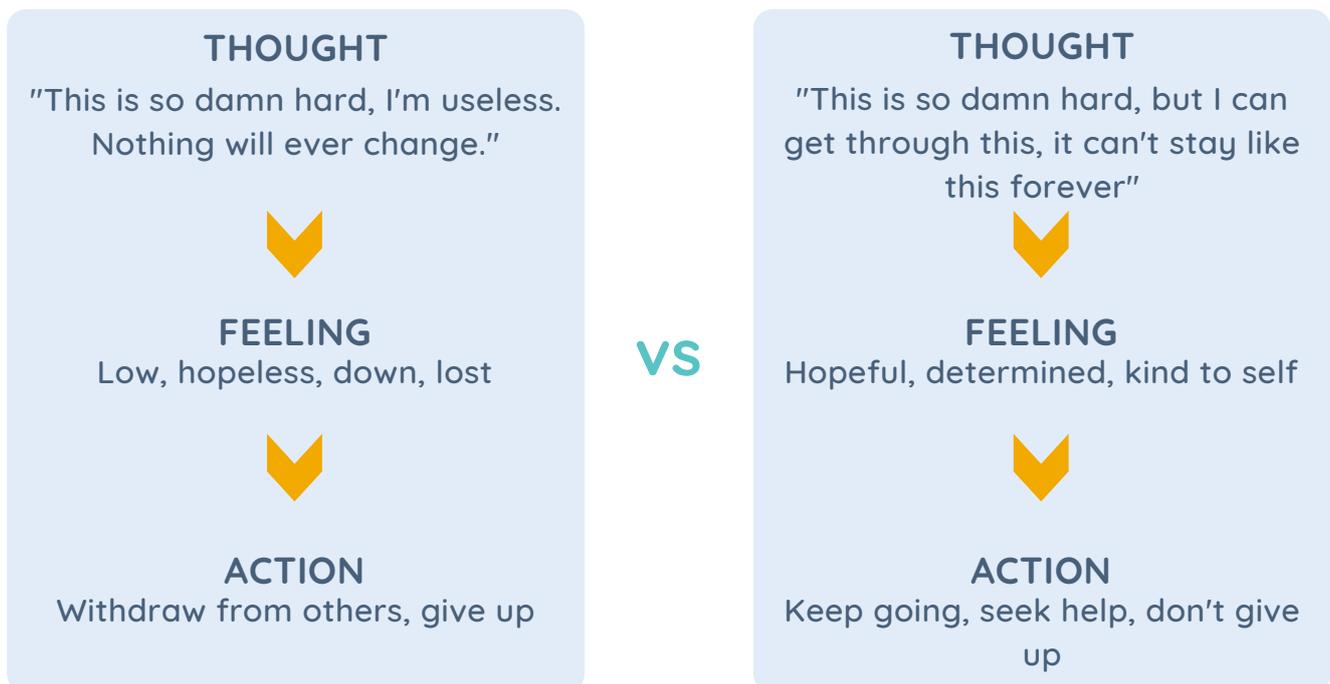
Our mind scans our environment for information and puts together a version of what it thinks is going on. When you've been feeling down, distressed, or stuck for some time, your mind begins to paint a very bleak picture of the future and make it seem like how you're feeling now won't ever change. That's simply not true. How do we know? Because psychologists have spent decades studying how the brain works, and we understand now more than we ever did about how thinking works and how thoughts can affect us.

Did you know?

The longer you've been thinking about suicide or harming yourself, the easier it is for those thoughts to pop in your mind uninvited. It's like when you're trying to remember something - the more you repeat and rehearse it in your mind, the better you remember it and the easier it comes to mind. The more you think about dying the stronger the thoughts get.

But just because the thought of dying comes to mind quickly and easily when you're feeling really horrible, does not mean it's the best or the only solution. It may just be the most rehearsed and remembered option.

An important thing to know about thoughts is that **you can change them to be more helpful**. Why is it important to try and change those thoughts? **Because what we think affects how we feel** and most importantly, it affects what we do. Consider the following example:



Trying to change your thoughts isn't about wishful positive thinking, and it doesn't dismiss how tough what you're going through is. It simply **helps your mind rehearse a different outcome of your struggle**. It helps you to see different options and ways forward. Learning to view suicidal thoughts simply as thoughts, rather than solutions is like having that annoying overplayed song come on the radio - you may not stop the radio playing it but you can turn down the volume or switch to another station.

In our **Depression Course**, we developed detailed, practical steps you can learn to identify, challenge, and change unhelpful thoughts, as well as many other strategies to help you get through a tough time. Your GP or psychologist can also help guide you through using these different coping skills.

2. TAKE ACTION TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

When you notice suicidal thoughts come to mind, particularly if the thoughts are frequent, persistent, and seemingly uncontrollable, the single most important thing to do is

Let someone know you're feeling this way and having these thoughts!

It may be one of the hardest things you'll ever do, but your future self will thank you for it. There are always people you can talk to.

If your mind's telling you there's no one there to help, again that's only a thought and not reality. If you don't have someone in your life right now, like a family member, a significant other, a friend or a colleague that you feel you can talk to, make a plan to speak with your GP if you can see him or her soon, alternatively, give Lifeline a call on 13 11 14 - Lifeline is a voluntary service, so people working there do so because they really want to help and be there when someone needs to talk about how they are feeling.



WHEN IT'S TIME TO PICK UP THE PHONE AND MAKE THE CALL

If the suicidal thoughts feel overwhelming or you notice yourself losing hope, give your local Mental Health Line a call - people there can direct you to services in your area and make a referral to see a specialist to help you. If you've made a plan to commit suicide and are feeling so low that you're thinking of going through with it - resist your thoughts and dial triple zero (000) - people there know what to do and how best to help you.

If you are feeling safe – you're not planning on harming yourself – below are some strategies designed to help you tone down suicidal thoughts and reduce negative feelings a bit without acting on them until they pass. **And they will pass!** These strategies won't solve what you're going through, but giving them a good go will help you feel a little clearer in your mind to make a plan to tackle and improve your current situation.

Many more strategies are included in our [Depression Course](#) and if you think working with someone on these would be most helpful, do speak with your GP about seeing a psychologist who can help. We suggest printing out this guide and filling it in as you go. You do not have to read through the entire thing in one go and we suggest tackling it step by step or getting others on board to help you.

3. MAKE A PLAN TO KEEP CALM AND STAY SAFE

When you're feeling distressed, down, or are having suicidal thoughts, it can sometimes be hard to think, so make a plan for how you will cope with these feelings and put it somewhere visible, so it can be a reminder of helpful things to try when it gets difficult to think straight.

We will guide you through putting together this plan. We have attached a template at the end, which you can print, keep in an easily accessible place, or take to your GP or psychologist so they can help you with some ideas. You can also share it with someone close so they know what to do if you're feeling suicidal.



Step 1. Write down early warning signs that indicate that you're about to feel really awful and will start thinking about suicide

The earlier you notice these signs, the sooner you can do something about it to prevent negative thoughts and feelings getting more intense. Some examples are listed below but we encourage you to identify and watch out for the signs that are directly relevant to you. These signs can help you know when to use this safety plan.

▲ Situations/Events: _____

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Something bad happened | <input type="checkbox"/> You're intoxicated or under the influence |
| <input type="checkbox"/> You had an argument with someone | <input type="checkbox"/> You had an argument with someone |

▲ Thoughts/Images: _____

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Thinking you're worthless | <input type="checkbox"/> Noticing you don't care about things |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Thinking there's no hope | <input type="checkbox"/> Picturing others being happier without you |

▲ Feelings/Mood: _____

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Feeling lonely and isolated | <input type="checkbox"/> Feeling distressed and panicked |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Feeling heavy, sad and lethargic | <input type="checkbox"/> Feeling irritable and on-edge |

▲ Behaviours: _____

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Spending a lot time by yourself | <input type="checkbox"/> Drinking excessively or using drugs |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Avoiding other people and going out | <input type="checkbox"/> ignoring phone calls and text messages |

Step 2. Write down what you will do to remain calm and safe when you're feeling suicidal

Tip: Remember, suicidal thoughts won't harm you unless you act on them, so the following coping strategies can help you cope with the thoughts and feelings without acting on them until they pass. We encourage you to write down more examples of things that are directly relevant to you.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Watching your favourite movie | <input type="checkbox"/> Grooming |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Going for a walk | <input type="checkbox"/> Re-reading your favourite childhood book |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Listening to an inspiration Ted Talk | <input type="checkbox"/> Making something (e.g., a meal from scratch, baking, origami) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Engaging in a hobby | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Doing some exercise | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Doing some house work | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Listening to your favourite uplifting music | |

Here are some tips for soothing painful feelings and tuning down suicidal thoughts:

Tip 1: Avoid mind-altering substances like alcohol and drugs

- ➔ Alcohol is a depressant, which means that it can 'take the edge off' how you are feeling in the moment, but it will disrupt your sleep and make it harder to get going the next day. Overtime, these sedative effects of alcohol can turn into feelings associated with depression, but many people don't realise that they're connected!
- ➔ Drugs that alter your consciousness, impair your decision-making and put you at risk of doing something you wouldn't otherwise do. The 'high' that some people who take drugs experience, also magnifies the negative feelings once it wears off, making it seem that you're feeling a lot worse than you were before you took drugs. Overtime, substances like marijuana, can contribute to the mental fog many people associate with depression. Again, people can miss the connection that something they think is helping is making them feel worse in the long run.

- If you have recently started taking antidepressant medication, changed dosages, swapped to another medication, or stopped taking regular medication suddenly and have experienced a worsening of suicidal thoughts, let your GP know immediately, as sometimes suicidal thoughts can be a side-effect of such a change.

Tip 2: Soothe your emotions

- If you're feeling restless and on edge, or if you're feeling lethargic or numb: do something active – a quick walk, jog, some star jumps or push ups – exercise can help with the nervous tension that's generated by painful feelings.
- If you're feeling tense and 'sick in your stomach', or feeling 'spacey' and numb, try to tune into your five senses and name five things you can see, four things you can hear, three things you can feel, two things you can smell, and one thing you can taste. You can also try to steady your breath, do a relaxation exercise or stretch out to release some tension.
- If your mind's racing, try to do something engaging and distracting, like watch a comedy show, try to solve a puzzle, do something active, or write the thoughts out on paper. Tidy the house. Watch a documentary.
- If you're feeling lonely or worthless, talk with someone. See if you can invite someone over, or chat with someone on the phone. If all else fails, call Lifeline and speak with someone.

Tip 3: Do something productive that will give you a sense of achievement

- Get a nagging task that's been hanging over your head done and out of the way, e.g.:
 - > Tidy up the house
 - > Organise bills and household paperwork
 - > Wash your car or bike
 - > Bake something or prepare a meal from scratch
 - > Declutter your wardrobe
 - > _____

Tip 4: Volunteer - do something for someone else

- ➔ Feeling useful is one of the strongest ways to combat hopeless suicidal thoughts, e.g.:
- > See if any of your friends or family need a hand with something
 - > Play with your pet or take your dog out for a long walk
 - > Write a nice message to someone
 - > _____

Tip 5: Plan and organise something to look forward to

- ➔ Plan something to look forward to later in the day, in the week or this month, e.g.:
- > Buy a ticket to a movie or a show, invite friends to come with you
 - > Organise an outing (e.g., a picnic, a camping trip)
 - > Make a plan to see your GP
 - > Make a plan to stay safe
 - > _____

Now, check out the table at the end of this resource, fill in some of your favourite activities, and brainstorm some ideas for how you will encourage yourself to engage in them. Remember, it is OK if you don't instantly feel great while engaging in these activities – the point here is that doing things suggested above is a way of 'riding out' painful thoughts and feelings, a way of shifting your mind away from thinking about suicide, and a way to reconnect you with some of the things that used to help you feel positive, effective, and useful.

Step 3. Write down what you can do with others to help you take your mind off how you're feeling

Once you have tried to improve how you are feeling on your own, it's time to see if connecting with others can help. In this step, the idea is to get in touch with people you know, like friends, relatives or neighbours to simply hang out and spend some time together as a way of taking your mind off how you are feeling and helping the thoughts and feelings pass.

If no one is around or free, see if you can get out to your favourite place, like gym, a coffee shop, a museum, or another place you can be around people. See if any events are on, like food festivals, or art shows in town. The idea here is to not be alone to help you feel less isolated.

Sometimes, when you're feeling suicidal, being around people is the last thing you feel like doing. This may be because you worry that you'll be a drag on others or that you cannot be bothered being social. Although these worries are understandable, often people find that once they connect with others, these thoughts go away. Focusing too much on your thoughts and how you are feeling can make you feel worse, which is when focusing on other things can really help.

When you don't particularly want to talk about your feelings, being in a place where you can be "alone with others" can help, such as reading your favourite book in the library or a café, or watching a local footy team play. Whatever the activity, the aim is to not be alone and to provide healthy distractions from how you are feeling. Here are some ideas, but make sure to write down ones that resonate with you the most:

- Checking out the local newspaper or website for events on in your town
- Inviting friends over for a pizza and a movie
- Going for a walk with a friend
- Visiting family members
- Checking out the social gatherings at your local library
- Going to a movie
- Having dinner out
- _____
- _____

Step 4. Write down who you can talk to directly about how you are feeling, who can help you with the current crisis

At times, the first three steps will be sufficient to help lift your mood and suicidal thoughts. Sometimes, you will need some help from others. This step is all about reaching out to people to talk about how you are doing and getting some help.

It can be a challenging decision to let others know how bad you are feeling, but much more often than not, it brings a sense of relief.

Unlike Step 3, here the aim is to get help, have someone come over to see you or go with you to seek further assistance. It is important you tell people that you're having thoughts about death, particularly if in that time you don't quite trust yourself to stay safe. Write down a list of people below whom you feel you can call and whom you trust to tell how you are feeling.

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Many people don't feel comfortable talking to loved ones or people they know about how they're feeling. In this situation, or you feel there's no one you know, it is important to reach out to professional services (below) – these people are there to help!

Step 4. Write down where you can seek professional help from or places you can go for support

Sometimes, when you're in crisis – which means you are having thoughts of killing yourself – and you've tried Steps 1 to 4 or you simply don't trust yourself to stay safe – it is time to speak with a professional about how you are feeling.

If you are having trouble reaching out to someone from Step 4 to talk to, you can ring Lifeline (13 11 14). Suicide Call Back Service (1300 659 467) is another option, and they also offer opportunities to chat online rather than on the phone.

The key is to take that step towards getting help!

Sometimes, going to see someone face-to-face is better. Outside of a crisis, your first point of call is a local GP. If you are actively suicidal – which means your suicidal thoughts are overwhelming, you cannot control them, or you have a plan and means to harm yourself – the best place to go is the emergency department at the local hospital.

Many people feel apprehensive about reaching out to professional services when feeling suicidal out of fear of being put into hospital against their own will. This happens much less frequently that you think and, more often than not, during times when the person themselves is incapable of making a clear decision about their safety.

Chances are, if you are reading this, you want to help yourself and at least on some level, you do not want to end your life. In this case, a mental health professional would talk with you about how best to help alleviate these feelings – the aim of a consult is to keep you safe, but much more about how to help you in the long run. Asking a support person to come with you can help alleviate some of the anxiety about seeking professional help.

List some names and services you can call or attend if you’re in crisis.

- Your GP _____
- Your therapist _____
- Lifeline - 13 11 14 - Free 24-hour crisis support service www.lifeline.org.au
- Suicide Call Back Service - 1300 659 467 - Free 24-hour telephone crisis support service www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au
- The Police or Ambulance - 000 - Emergency Assistance

Australian State Crisis Service Numbers

| | | |
|--|--|--------------------------------------|
| NSW- Mental Health Line 1800 011 511 | VIC- Suicide Help Line 1300 651 251 | QLD- 13 HEALTH 13 43 25 84 |
| TAS- Mental Health Helpline 1800 332 288 | SA- Mental Health Triage Service 13 14 65 | WA- MHERL 1800 676 822 |
| NT- Top End Mental Health Service 08 8999 4988 | ACT- Mental Health Triage Service 1800 629 354 | |

*Please note that the numbers listed above are for calls made in Australia. If you’re in another country, you will need to access your local services.

Step 6. Write down what you need to do to keep your environment safe

You may have thought about suicide for a long time, and may have even made a plan for how you might end your life. The thing about having a plan and access to the necessary equipment is that it greatly increases your risk of **acting on impulse** in response to distressing thoughts and feelings. In other words, having things accessible **makes you vulnerable to doing things you would otherwise regret.**

Therefore, make sure your environment – a place where you spend most of your time when you’re feeling suicidal, such as your home – does not have easily accessible means of hurting yourself.

This is a vital step in staying calm and keeping yourself safe

Write down below some actions you need to take to rid your environment of things you can use to harm yourself. These can include getting rid of these items completely or giving them to others for safe keeping. You could also make it harder for yourself to access these items to slow you down enough for the urge to harm yourself to pass and for you not to act impulsively.

This includes avoiding mind-altering substances if you notice one or more of the warning signs you identified in Step 1.

- _____
- _____
- _____

Most Importantly - HOLD ON TO HOPE

Finally, it is so important to hold on to hope by thinking about things in your life worth living for. For some it is their children, family, friends, or pets, while for others it is the thought of having their favourite food, visiting their favourite place, or doing something they’ve always loved doing.

No matter what it is that used to spark your joy, hold on to it, because positive feelings can and do return.

4. PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER AND CREATING YOUR PLAN

At the end of this resource we included a page to write out this plan to keep calm and stay safe. We strongly encourage you to print it out, fill it in, and keep it somewhere easily accessible. When your mind is clouded by painful thoughts and feelings, you need something pre-prepared to trigger helpful action. You can also make copies and give it to people you identified in Step 4, to help them know how best to help you. Finally, you can take a copy with you when you go to see your GP or a mental health professional who can further help you put some useful strategies together.

We go into a lot more detail about strategies to combat feelings of anxiety and depression in our online courses, and we encourage you to check them out – either on your own, or with guidance from your GP or psychologist.



It is great to see that you've got to this point and we sincerely hope that you have found this resource helpful!

We wish you all the best going forward,

The Team at ThisWayUp
www.thiswayup.org.au



Keep Calm, Stay Safe Plan



| Internal Coping Strategy Things that generally help you feel better and have helped you in the past when you've felt really down or suicidal. | How likely are you to use it when feeling suicidal? 1 = Not very likely 5 = Very likely | What barriers can prevent you from using it when feeling suicidal? | What can you do to overcome these barriers and use this coping strategy when feeling suicidal? |
|---|--|---|---|
| <i>Take a Bath</i> | 3 | <i>Too much effort and takes too long to prep</i> | <i>Prepare a "bathtime" box with all the essentials ahead of time so it's readily available</i> |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |

Keep Calm, Stay Safe Plan

STEP 1. I will use this plan when...

- _____
- _____
- _____

STEP 2. I will try to stay calm and help myself feel better by...

- _____
- _____
- _____

STEP 3. I will try to take my mind off how I am feeling by...

- _____
- _____
- _____

STEP 4. To help me feel less lonely and to talk about how I'm feeling I will get in touch with...

- _____
- _____
- _____

STEP 5. To help me work through my thoughts and feelings I will reach out to...

- _____
- _____
- _____

STEP 6. I will make my surroundings safe and comforting by...

- _____
- _____

The things I love that are worth living for are...



To access additional tools for coping with stress,
anxiety, or low mood when things are tough,
please visit

www.thiswayup.org.au/coping-tools



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