

AFTER A SUICIDE ATTEMPT: HOW YOU CAN HELP

Adapted from "A Journey Toward Health & Hope: Your Handbook for Recovery After a Suicide Attempt"

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

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HOW DID IT GET TO THIS POINT? The time right after a suicide attempt can be the most confusing and emotional part of one's entire life. In some ways, it may be even more difficult than the time preceding the attempt. Not only is the individual still facing the thoughts and feelings that led to consider suicide, but now there can be the struggle to figure out what to do after surviving the attempt.

A variety of stressful situations can lead to suicidal feelings, and just as it took time for the pain that led to the attempt to become unbearable, it may also take some time for it to subside. That's okay. The important thing is that the individual is still alive, which means there is time to find healthier and more effective ways to cope with the pain.

WHAT IS THE PERSON FEELING RIGHT NOW? Right now, there are usually many conflicting emotions. Right after an attempt, many survivors have said that the pain that led them to harm themselves was still present. Some felt angry that they survived their attempt. Others felt embarrassed, ashamed, or guilty that they put their family and friends through a difficult situation. Most felt alone and said they had no idea how to go on living. They didn't know what to expect and even questioned whether they had the strength to stay alive. Still others felt that if they survived their attempt, there must be some reason they were still alive, and they wanted to discover why.

IS THE PERSON THE ONLY ONE WHO FEELS THIS WAY? It is estimated that more than one million people attempt suicide each year in the U.S. from all parts of society. In other words, the individual is not alone. However, it can be hard to know how other survivors recovered because suicide is a personal topic that often is not discussed openly and honestly. This can leave those affected feeling like they don't know where to turn.

KNOWING HOW TO HELP: It is difficult to know what to say to a person who has attempted suicide, but showing support and understanding is important. One can tell them that "It's okay if you feel conflicting emotions right now. You are not alone. You matter. Life can get better. It may be difficult, but the effort you invest in your recovery will be worth it."

Help plan with the person how to deal with others' who might ask questions about the suicide attempt. Have the person practice what to say when the person doesn't want to talk about the attempt:

- "You are so thoughtful to worry about me, but I'd rather not talk about it right now."
- "Even though I've been through a tough time, I'm getting better."
- "I know you are trying to be helpful, but it's hard to understand if you haven't experienced the kind of pain that led me to attempt suicide."
- "I appreciate your concern, but I'm just not ready to talk about it yet."

Remind them that It's their story to tell, or not. The details of their experience are personal, and it's up to them to determine what they want to share and with whom.

Help them re-establish connections. Often the stress or depression that leads to a suicide attempt can cause people to disconnect from others who care about them or the things they used to enjoy doing. Reconnecting with the people and things one loves or loved can help instill hope.

Remind them that suicidal thoughts might return, and the person will want to be prepared with a plan to stay safe. A safety plan is a tool that can help them identify triggers (like events or experiences) that lead to suicidal thoughts and can help with coping if the pain that led to the attempt returns.

Encourage finding and working with a counselor who can help them with starting to recover. Unlike friends or family, a counselor is an unbiased listener who won't be personally affected by the suicide attempt. The counselor's role is to help with sorting through feelings and finding ways to feel better. A counselor can be a peer supporter, psychiatrist, social worker, psychologist, or other skilled individual. If counseling isn't possible, there are also ways one can help oneself, but it is important to remind the person to avoid going through this difficult time alone.

SUPPORT CAN MAKE THINGS EASIER: It might be difficult initially, but having someone the person feels comfortable talking to after an attempt is very important. There will likely be challenges moving forward, and knowing there is at least one individual to turn to will make the road to recovery less daunting. Being alone with suicidal thoughts can be dangerous. Having supportive people around can be a crucial part of staying safe.

Download "*A Journey Toward Health & Hope*" at <http://store.samhsa.gov/SMA15-4419> If in crisis anytime, day or night contact the National Suicide and Prevention Lifeline 1-800-273-8255 or live chat www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org.

**If you need immediate assistance contact the
National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 1-800-273-8255
Colorado Crisis & Support Line 1-844-493-8255**