

How to speak with someone who has suicidal thoughts?

Witnessing a loved one experience suicidal ideations can be overwhelming.

While many of us are not trained professionals, each of us can help support those in crisis.

Here are some ways to support a loved one who may be experiencing suicidal thoughts.



- **Find a safe space and time:**
Choose a quiet and private space to talk to them about it sensitively. Check if it is the right time to have a conversation.
- **Start gently:**
Start by expressing concern, refer to the action/behaviour that alerted you. Share your genuine concern for their safety.
- **Listen without judgement:**
Listen to understand and support, not to judge. Let them know that it's a safe space to share.
- **Validate & Assure:**
Stigma can make people feel isolated or ashamed that they are feeling suicidal. Let them know that their feelings are valid and assure them of your support.
- **Extend your support:**
Communicate that you are here to help in as many ways as possible. Build hope by identifying supportive people and coping strategies. For example, you can encourage reaching out to their support systems, help make an appointment for therapy, help them buy groceries, send cooked meals, etc.
- **Link them to resources:**
Link them to online and offline resources as required. This can include supportive family members, helplines such as **iCALL-9152987821**, peer support groups, mental health practitioners, community groups, etc.
- **Follow up:**
Staying in touch reminds them that you care. Be sure to follow up on a regular basis.

Dos & Don'ts of speaking to someone having suicidal thoughts

When talking to someone who is experiencing suicidal thoughts some responses can make people feel rejected, unheard, guilty, or criticised.

Here are some unhelpful responses that should be avoided and some preferred alternatives that will help the person feel supported.

Don't promise secrecy:

"Don't worry, I won't tell anyone."



Set realistic expectation:

"Thank you for sharing with me. Are there others you trust whom we can reach out to for help?"

Don't invalidate a person's experience:

"Others have gone through much worse, don't let little things bother you."



Validate & Normalize people's experiences:

"You seem to be going through a very challenging time, no wonder you are feeling this way."

Don't judge people for expressing their distress:

"Stop crying", "It's weak to feel suicidal. Be strong."



Show Empathy and Support:

"I understand how you are feeling. This is a safe space. I won't judge you. I am here for you."

Do not shame or make them feel guilty:

"How could you do this to me/ your family/your kids?"



Recognize their struggle:

"It must be so difficult to cope with all of this alone. This is so tough."

Don't try to fix or control their feelings:

"Stop crying, I know what you need to do."



Show your support in finding solutions:

"I know there are no clear answers but together we will navigate through this."

Don't be angry if they aren't receptive at first:

"I told you how you should handle the situation, still why are you feeling this way?"



Check in regularly:

"How are you feeling? Has anything we talked about helped? How else can I help?"