

# Suicide Prevention: Creating a Safety Plan

If you suspect someone is having suicidal thoughts, you should ask that person directly to find out if it's true. Many people are afraid to ask and talk about suicide, because they're afraid that it will give that person ideas or trigger suicidal thoughts. This isn't true. Those who struggle with suicidal ideation often cry out for help in subtle ways and might be relieved to share what they're going through. So, if you're concerned someone might hurt him or herself, here are some questions you can ask:

- In the past few weeks, have you wished you were dead or been thinking about killing yourself?

If the person answers yes to the first question, then continue asking:

- Have you thought about how you would kill yourself?
- Do you have the means to carry out your ideas about how you want to kill yourself?
- Have you thought about when you would kill yourself?

## Identifying someone who is actively suicidal and what to do

If the person states that he or she has a plan, the means to carry out the plan and has decided a time to commit suicide, or refuses to answer, then that person is actively suicidal. At that point, the person needs a full mental health evaluation and you should not leave that person alone until cleared by a professional. Keep the person in sight. Ask someone to transport you to the Comprehensive Psychiatric Emergency Program (CPEP) or call 911 immediately.

## Helping someone who has suicidal thoughts, but is not actively suicidal

If a person has no plan of when or how they would kill themselves, but still has suicidal thoughts at times, then this is called passive ideation. In that case, the person doesn't need an immediate full psychiatric evaluation, but you should recommend that person connect to a professional counselor. In the meantime, you can create a Safety Plan with the person until he or she gets professional help.

## Safety Plan

A Safety Plan fosters honest conversation with those who have passive suicidal ideation to enhance their coping skills and commitment to treatment. First, ask if the person is willing to make a contract of safety with you. If the person agrees, then give him or her a pen and paper to write down answers for the following six steps.

1. **Be aware of your own warning signs:** What are some feelings, images, thoughts, situations, and behaviors that indicate to you that a crisis may be developing? Write them down in your words and please continue the same way with the following steps.
2. **Use your own coping strategies:** What are some things you can do on your own so that you will not act on urges to harm or kill yourself? Please list them.
3. **Be in social situations or interactions that distract you from the crisis:** List people and social settings that may help take your mind off of the suicidal ideation. Can this be sitting in a coffee shop? Being in the park or any other public place?
4. **Reach out to family members or friends who you feel safe talking about your suicidal thoughts:** Make a list of 2-3 people who you feel can be understanding and you can talk to when you have suicidal thoughts.
5. **Contact mental health professionals or agencies:** Make a list of names, numbers and/or locations of clinicians, local emergency rooms, and crisis hotlines and save them on your phone.
  - The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255 (En Español: 1-888-628-9454)
  - 24/7 Crisis Text Line: text “HOME” to 741-741
  - NYC Well:
    - Hotline: 1-800-NYCWELL
    - Text: “WELL” to 65173
6. **Make your environment safe:** What are ways in which you might harm yourself? What are ways you can make the method less accessible?

There are also phone apps of safety plans that you can download with the person, such as MY3, Suicide Safety Plan, or Stanley-Brown Safety Plan, as a few examples, and you can walk through the safety plan with them. Once you’ve helped create the safety plan, follow up with the person to see if they’ve connected with a counselor and continue to be there for support.