

Helping a mate who is suicidal

Warning signs

It can be pretty hard for some guys to express their feelings. They might be embarrassed or worried they'll be seen as weak, think they don't have anyone to talk to, or just not know where to start. If a guy is thinking about hurting himself, chances are he'll be showing signs in the way he looks, acts or talks. If your mate's really struggling, he might not want or be able to talk to you about how he's feeling, but these warning signs can give you a clue that something's really wrong. Pay attention to the way your mate's acting, and look out for these warning signs.

Physical changes – How does he look?

- Eating too much or too little, or putting on or losing weight
- Looking unusually scruffy, or not paying attention to personal hygiene (e.g. not showering)
- Signs he might have hurt himself on purpose – unusual scars, burn marks or bruises

Behaviours – What's he doing?

- Quitting or losing interest in things he used to like (e.g. sports or hobbies)
- Emotional outbursts, or crying for no apparent reason
- Acting dangerously or irresponsibly (e.g. driving recklessly)
- Unusual aggression or fighting
- Not going out or withdrawing from mates
- Getting really drunk or high
- Giving away his belongings
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Tiredness or loss of energy

Conversation – What's he saying?

- Feeling hopeless about the future – *“There's just no point.”*
- Feeling alone – *“No one understands.”*
- Wanting escape – *“I need to get out; I can't deal with this any more.”*
- Feeling guilty – *“It's all my fault.”*
- Feeling helpless – *“It doesn't matter what I do, bad things just happen to me.”*

Sometimes people will make more obvious reference to suicide or self-harm. They might talk about or plan for suicide, write a suicide note, or threaten to kill or hurt themselves.

This is not attention-seeking – if someone threatens to hurt or kill themselves, take it seriously.

Stay with them if they're at risk, and get professional help as soon as you can.

Taking action

An important part of being a good mate is reaching out when someone's struggling. If your mate's showing a few warning signs and you think something might be up, don't ignore him. Good mates step up and take action. If you feel comfortable, talking to your mate yourself is a good place to start. Find time to have a chat somewhere private – preferably when you're both relaxed and can talk openly without being interrupted – and ask him how things are going.

1300 78 99 78
mensline.org.au

MensLine Australia is a professional telephone and online support, and referral service for men, specialising in family and relationship concerns.

This can be a pretty hard conversation, so you might find the following tips helpful:

- Act quickly. If you're worried about your mate, don't put off talking to him.
- If you're not sure how to start, try letting him know what you've noticed. *"Hey mate – I've noticed you haven't really been yourself lately. You've seemed really down and you haven't been at footy training. Is something up?"*
- Stay calm and listen to what he has to say without judging him.
- Don't dismiss his problems, but try and be reassuring.
- Tell him that you care about him and are there to support him.
- If you think he might be thinking about suicide, don't be afraid to ask him directly. It won't put the idea in his head or make him more likely to go through with it – that's a myth. If he is feeling suicidal, he might be relieved he can talk about it openly. *"It sounds like things are really tough for you at the moment. Have you ever thought about suicide?"*
- If he does feel suicidal, he might be worried about what might happen if other people find out. He may ask you to keep it a secret or promise not to tell anyone. Secrets like this can be very dangerous, and it's really important you do tell someone. You'll be making sure he gets help and possibly even saving his life.
- If he tells you he's suicidal, remember you can call a helpline together (see below) to get some immediate support – they can help you keep him safe.
- Ask him to promise that if he has suicidal thoughts, he will reach out and tell someone.
- Try and encourage him to see a professional (see below). *"Mate, have you ever thought about talking to a counsellor? They're trained at this kind of stuff – I reckon it could be worth seeing someone. You don't have to go it alone."*
- If he doesn't want to talk, don't give up. Try another time, or let someone else (his parents, a counsellor, another mate) know you're worried.

Getting help

Supporting a mate to get professional help when he's feeling overwhelmed or suicidal is really important. Encourage him to speak to a doctor, counsellor, psychologist or other health professional. Offer to go with him for support if he's feeling uneasy. His GP is a good place to start, as they'll know what services are available in his area, and be able to refer him on if it's appropriate.

Guys might also find telephone counselling helpful. It means they can talk to a trained counsellor at any time of the day or night. Give him a couple of the following numbers (all 24/7) and encourage him to call if he needs to.

MensLine Australia (1300 78 99 78) – Professional telephone and online counselling, support, information and referral service for all men.

Suicide Call Back Service (1300 659 467) – Telephone support service staffed by professional counsellors, suitable for anyone who's feeling suicidal or worried about someone who is suicidal.

Looking after yourself

Finding out a mate might be thinking about suicide is pretty upsetting and stressful. It's important you look after yourself. Make sure you're still eating and sleeping properly, managing your stress levels and taking time out. Talk to someone you trust – your own mates, your family or your partner. If you need some extra help, get in touch with a counsellor or other professional to have a chat about the situation, and how you can cope.

It's also really important that you remember that no matter what happens, the way your mate's feeling or behaving isn't your fault. You're not responsible for his actions, but you can support him and encourage him to get help.

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