

Take Action!

You may be the only person between death and life once you become aware that someone is suicidal. It's important that you TAKE ACTION. You can't wait it out, or second guess yourself. It's better to assume and be proactive, even at the risk of being wrong, than to wait until it's too late! Don't ever ignore that nagging feeling that someone is considering suicide.

Steps to take if you suspect someone wants to harm themselves:

1. **Stop and pray before you approach the person!** You are about to come up against a FORCE to be reckoned with. A person who is truly suicidal has **partnered up** with the spirit of death to end their existence on the earth; they have backup! If you go into this without the *Spirit of Life* as your partner, you are immediately outnumbered and outmatched.
2. **Have moral support for yourself.** Send out a text or make a few quick phone calls to people who can offer you moral support and let them know what you are about to do. Ask them to pray for you and be on standby in case you need to call them for assistance. If possible, take someone with you. Dealing with a person who is suicidal can be triggering. It's good to have a support team behind you.
3. **Call 988 or your local Crisis Line before talking to the person.** Get some advice from a specialist about how to handle the situation, who to call if it escalates, and perhaps having a mobile crisis team dispatched. FYI, this call could take time that you don't have. You may need to have another friend or family member handle this part while you make your way to the person in crisis. Judge the situation at hand and respond accordingly. You can always have a chat open with 988 by text, or even have them on the line on a Bluetooth headset for guidance if the person in crisis does not want to speak with them directly.
4. **If possible, please go to the person so you can be in their physical presence.** If you can't be there in person, keep them on the phone, preferably on a video chat. The last resort would be texting. The power of human touch, the power of a kind voice will go a long way in these situations. But remember—this is not always possible, so please don't beat yourself up over it.
5. **Assess if the person is in imminent danger that requires a call to 911.** It's important to understand that 988 is NOT equipped to dispatch first responders in an emergency. Imminent danger is: *someone standing on the ledge of a building, holding a knife in their hand, wielding, or even talking about retrieving a gun, etc.* If the person is "sitting in a bathtub full of water ready to drown themselves" or posing any other **immediate threat to their lives, PLEASE DIAL 911**; and stay on the phone, or in their presence, until help arrives.

6. **Stay with the person until they are stable.** This is a process that could take hours. Treat it as a priority. If you have something planned, cancel it. If you need to go to work, call out! This is a life-or-death emergency. The rest of the world can wait! **Escalated suicidal depression** can be described as “a fog”. Getting to the point where you are willing to commit an act of lethal self-harm is like having an *out-of-body experience*. When I was in *the fog*, I could always feel when it was lifting, and you should be able to sense the shift as the person “comes to”. Below are signs that may indicate someone is in a suicidal fog. (*This is not a comprehensive list.*)

- *Avoiding eye contact.*
- *Being unable to express emotion—anger, happiness, even sadness. You may think someone who is suicidal feels sad. The truth is, they often don’t feel anything.*
- *Complaining of physical pain in the body or trouble breathing.*
- *You may notice repetitive body movements, such as rocking, handwringing, touching a certain part of the body repeatedly, etc.*
- *Low speaking volume, exhibiting an unwillingness to talk, or giving short, dismissive responses.*
- *Feeling overly sleepy and/or physically weak.*
- *Conversation that is locked in on death, such as saying goodbye, talking about what death is like, expressing thoughts about people living without them, or saying they feel exhausted, etc.*

Most of the time, you will be able to tell when a person has left the *suicidal fog* by their body language and verbal cues. This is why it is important to be in their presence, or on a video chat, when possible. And FYI, any display of emotion, even if it’s anger or sadness, is a positive sign. *Feeling* comes before *dealing* and *dealing* before *healing*! In other words, you can’t heal what you don’t deal with, and you won’t deal with what you don’t feel.

7. **Get them out of their current environment.** Once the smoke has cleared enough for the person to have a little clarity of mind, a change of scenery can be helpful. When circumstances permit, treat them to a meal and discuss an action plan for moving forward. A tasty meal can be a great way to give someone a little jolt of happiness! Going for a walk is a second option. Even moving to a different room in the house can help. If you are not physically with them, maybe you can encourage them to have a meal, or go for a walk with you, via video chat. Changing environments is an effective way to temporarily distract a person from thoughts of suicide, and movement helps boost energy.