Dealing with Suicidal Thoughts: An information leaflet

“I am seriously considering suicide…what should I do?”

Having thoughts of suicide can be very scary and overwhelming – you may feel that you cannot cope or that you are losing control. You may feel that you cannot stand another minute of feeling so bad and that you want to escape from it all.

If you are having thoughts about suicide, you are not alone. Many people have thoughts of suicide, for lots of different reasons. However most of these people do have one thing in common – they have thoughts of suicide because they are looking for a way to escape the pain that they are feeling.

Even though you feel hopeless right now, there are ways to get through this – you are not alone. This leaflet is to help you find out about the help that is available to you. You can take some small steps to help yourself right now. Three useful ideas that may help you in the short term are listed in the box below.

1) Talk to others...
If you are worried that you might do something to harm yourself or feel anxious about losing control, tell someone. If you live on your own it might be a good idea to ask a family member or good friend if they will come and stay with you. Sharing how you feel with others will be a weight off your shoulders. If you really feel you have no one to talk to, you can always ring one of the confidential helplines listed at the end of this leaflet – there is always someone available 24 hours a day, and you can remain anonymous if you wish.

2) Make your home a safe place...
Get rid of all the things in your home that could be used to harm or kill yourself, such as alcohol, pills, razor blades, sharp knives or guns. If you can’t do this, try to go somewhere that you feel safe (e.g. stay with family or friends).

3) Make your own ‘safety’ plan
It is helpful to have a written safety plan to look at when you have thoughts of harming yourself. You can fill out your own personal safety plan over the page in the spaces provided. Remember to keep your plan in a place where you can always get to it quickly and easily. Try to fill out your plan when you are feeling relaxed and comfortable. It may help you to fill out your safety plan with a trusted friend or family member. Then, when you have suicidal thoughts you can take yourself through each step of your plan until you feel safer. If you go through each step and still do not feel safe, you should contact a family member, friend, telephone helpline or 999.
My safety plan

Fill out the safety plan below, and keep it in a safe place so that you can access it quickly and easily when you are having suicidal thoughts. Remember – suicidal thoughts can be very strong, but they do not last forever. They will eventually pass, and when they do you can put your energy into sorting out the issues that made you feel so bad in the first place.

**Step one: The following activities will comfort me / calm me / make me feel better:**

**Step two: The following are my reasons for living:**

**Step three: I can call one of the following friends / family members for support:**

1) Name: Phone:
2) Name: Phone:
3) Name: Phone:

**Step four: I can call my GP / Psychologist / Psychiatrist / CPN / Care co-ordinator:**

1) Name: Phone:
2) Name: Phone:

**Step five: If I can’t get through to any of the above, or they don’t really help I can ring the following helpline:**

Choice 1: Name: Phone
Choice 2: Name: Phone

**Step six: I can take myself to a safe place (i.e. somewhere where I cannot harm myself – e.g. a friends house, a certain comforting room in the house, somewhere I enjoy being)**

Safe place 1:
Safe place 2:

**Step seven: If I have harmed myself I should go to the emergency room of my nearest hospital, or call 999 if I can’t get there safely.**
“What else can I do to reduce my suicidal thoughts?”

There are many things you can try out that may help reduce how often you experience suicidal thoughts. These activities may also help reduce the intensity and severity of your thoughts. All of the following suggestions are things that you can try yourself, without having to rely on other people.

**Idea one: Think about all the things you have to live for.**

Many people who have suicidal thoughts do not necessarily want to die – they just want to escape their pain. When we feel low, we often focus on the negative rather than the positive – this is what makes it easy to think about suicide as the only option. Try to think about all the reasons you have for living, for example your family, your friends, your pets, your religion and your responsibilities to others. Thinking about these things should remind you why you don’t want to act on your suicidal thoughts.

**Idea two: Think about what has helped you in the past**

Try to think about what has helped you feel better in the past when you have previously experienced suicidal thoughts. For example, did you reach out to friends and family for help, see a health professional, follow your safety plan, do something you enjoy or relaxes you? If it helped in the past, it might help you again now.

**Idea three: Go to a health professional for help**

You can go and see your Doctor for advice about what treatments may be available to help you overcome your suicidal thoughts and negative feelings. This does not necessarily mean medication – there are various other options available such as talking therapies or self-help materials that could help you deal with your suicidal thoughts. There is no reason to feel embarrassed about asking your Doctor for help – looking after your mind and your thoughts is just as important as looking after yourself physically.

**Idea four: Talk to someone!**

As mentioned previously, talking about how you feel can ease your suicidal thoughts. Many people say that they feel great relief after discussing how they feel with somebody they trust – it makes them feel less alone and more understood. Remember that even if you feel you have no one in your life you can turn to, you can always ring one of the confidential helplines recommended at the end of this leaflet.
Idea five: Surprise yourself! Do the opposite of how you feel...

When we feel low, we often feel like being alone, and may not want to see anybody or do anything. If you find yourself feeling this way, try challenging yourself and do the complete opposite of what you are feeling. For example, if you feel like being alone and don’t want to go out, ring a friend and see if they would like to meet up, or simply drag yourself outside and go for a walk. Doing the opposite of how you feel can make you realise that there are things you can do to make yourself feel a bit better. Have a go – try to surprise yourself!

Idea six: Try problem-solving

Trying to think of alternative ways of solving your problem can be useful. It is easy to become overwhelmed by suicidal thoughts and they can often prevent us from seeing other ways that we may be able to solve our problems. You could try simply writing a list of all of your problems, and then for each problem list as many possible solutions for that problem as you can think of. This makes it easier to see that suicide is not the only option. If you have difficulty with this exercise, you could ask someone you trust to help you (e.g. friend, family or health professional). You may find you end up with a great long list of problems, but this doesn’t matter – you can take one problem at a time and try to deal with it individually. Even by solving one or two small problems you can make big differences to how you feel. Additionally, this then makes it easier for you to focus on the bigger problems you may have. If you want to find out more about problem solving you can ask your health professional for more information, or take a look at some of the recommended websites or books at the end of this leaflet.
“Why do I get these suicidal thoughts in the first place?”

Some of the reasons that may lead you to have suicidal thoughts are:

- **Mental health problems:** Mental health problems such as anxiety and depression can increase the likelihood of suicidal thoughts. There are some very effective treatments available for mental health problems, so it is important to speak to your Doctor if you feel anxious, stressed or low. There are also some very useful self-help resources available – see the end of this leaflet for more information.

- **Arguments with family or friends:** Arguing with those close to you can make you feel low, and you may sometimes feel that they would be better off without you. However, it is important to remember that conflict with other people doesn’t last forever, and ending your life will not solve that conflict.

- **Loss and Bereavement:** The end of a relationship, losing a job, or losing a friend or family member can all increase chances of suicidal thoughts. Although right now your loss may seem unbearable or overwhelming, there are services and people who care and want to help you get through difficult times. See the end of this leaflet for some organisations that can help.

- **Drug and/or alcohol problems:** Using alcohol or drugs usually make suicidal thoughts worse. Although drugs and alcohol may feel as though they make you feel better for a short time, they will only make you feel worse in the long term. See the end of this leaflet if you need some information on services that could help you with drug or alcohol problems.

- **Financial or legal issues:** Debt, gambling, or problems with the law in general can be extremely stressful and can lead to the feeling that there is no way out of the problem. However, there are free services that can help you such as the Citizens Advice Bureau. See the end of this leaflet for your local centre.

- **Medical problems:** Some people think more about suicide when they are diagnosed with an illness or disease, even if it is not life threatening. Make sure that you see your doctor if you are worried about your health – they will be able to advise you on the best action to take to lead as healthy a life as possible.

- **Sexual identity issues:** Individuals who are gay, bisexual, lesbian or transgender may be at higher risk of suicide, as they have to deal with confusion about sexual identity and may have fears about rejection from family and friends. Talking to a health professional may help – you can discuss options with your Doctor.

- **Loss of social interaction and social support:** If you spend a lot of time alone and don’t feel you have anybody to talk to, your chances of developing suicidal thoughts may be higher. This is why talking to people you can trust is really important. If you don’t feel you have anyone close to you that you can trust, you could try to develop some new friendships, perhaps by attending a new class, course or group. Volunteering is also a great way to meet new people, and can also give you a greater sense of meaning in your life. You may also find it useful to talk to a health professional about your feelings – it is often more helpful speaking to someone you don’t know rather than someone you do know. Alternatively, you can always ring one of the helplines suggested at the end of this leaflet.
“How can I reduce the chances of getting suicidal thoughts in the future?"

Take a look at the diagram below for a few tips about how to look after yourself and avoid suicidal thoughts in the future.

- **Get professional support:** Make an appointment with your GP to discuss your options. If given medication, be sure to take it only as your doctor advises.
- **Self-care:** Taking care of yourself will make you feel better. Try to eat healthily, exercise, and avoid alcohol / drugs.
- **Remind yourself of your goals:** Think about the things you want to achieve (e.g. travelling, learning something new, volunteer work, go back to school, read a particular book).
- **Avoid high risk situations:** Avoid situations that increase your suicidal thinking (e.g. drinking alcohol with friends may make you feel worse later, so you could try to avoid this).
- **Keep to a routine:** This will help you feel more in control. Get up and go to bed at the same time, and plan some enjoyable or helpful activities into your day (e.g. exercise).
- **Do things you enjoy:** Try to do some of the things you used to enjoy, even if you don’t really feel like it.
“How can I find out more and where else can I go for help?”

Below are some useful contact details for some local organisations that may be able to help you. There are also some useful websites and recommended self-help books should you wish to learn more about your thoughts and feelings. Please note that this leaflet and the resources suggested below are not intended to replace professional care, and you should always see your Doctor if you are experiencing suicidal thoughts.

Useful local phone numbers

**Alcoholics Anonymous** – 0845 769 7555

**Carers support** – 01872 261 035. Website: www.cornwallcarers.org.uk
Provide advice, information and support to all unpaid carers who are regularly looking after a disabled, ill or frail relative, friend or neighbour.

**CADA (Cornwall alcohol and Drugs Agency)** – 01872 263 001
Alcohol and Drugs counselling service (individual and group)

**Citizens Advice Bureau** – 01392 425 517
Advice about practical problems including benefits, debt, legal issues, support services, care in the community, the mental health act etc.

**Cruse Bereavement Care** – 01726 76100
A countywide service offering support to all bereaved individuals of any age

**Local Community Mental Health Team** – 01208 251300
This is the general contact number for all of the local Community Health Mental Health Team, including their out-of-hours contact number.

**Relate** – 01726 74128
Relationship counselling and psychosexual therapy

**Samaritans** – 08457 90 90 90 (National number) 01872 277 277 (Local number)
Listening and befriending service to all in need.

**Women’s Rape & Sexual Abuse Centre and Domestic Violence Support (WRSAC, Cornwall) Helpline** – 01208 77099 (Rape and Sexual Abuse) 01208 79992 (Domestic Violence)
Face to face/telephone support and advice service.

**CASULL** – 01726 823 515. Website: www.rclproject.com
Rural Community Link Project: Free information about mental health and related issues

Useful Websites

**www.outlooksw.co.uk** – This is the Outlook South West website. We have a very useful self-help section that gives further book and website recommendations, as well as links to other self-help documents that you can download and print off for free!

**www.cci.health.wa.gov.au** - Excellent free self-help workbooks that you can print off and work through at your own pace (Including Depression, Social Anxiety, Bipolar Disorder, Panic, Worry, Self-Esteem, Disordered Eating)
**www.livinglifetothefull.com** – Great website offering a free online life skills course working on skills such as problem solving, assertiveness, healthy living, relaxation etc.

**http://moodgym.anu.edu.au/** - Free online self-help course looking at mood improvement.