

# Addressing suicidal thoughts and feelings

## What is suicidal ideation?

Suicidal ideation is a broad term used to describe thinking about, or planning to take, your own life.

If you, or someone you know is having these thoughts, it is important to recognise the warning signs and understand the overwhelming feelings that are associated.

- Your mind may be preoccupied with imagined scenarios and different methods of suicide
- You may have feelings that people would be better off without you, or feel hopeless – like there is no point in living
- You may be making clear plans to take your own life

The following feelings are common with people consumed by suicidal ideations. These thoughts may build gradually, or they may fluctuate:

- Tearful and overwhelmed by negativity
- Intolerable emotional pain that feels like it will never end
- Useless, unwanted, or unneeded by others
- Revenge, guilt or shame
- Desperate, as if you have no other choice
- Severe remorse and self-criticism
- Cut off from your body or physically numb

## Who can be affected?

Anyone can have suicidal feelings, irrespective of their background, and they have a wide range of possible causes.

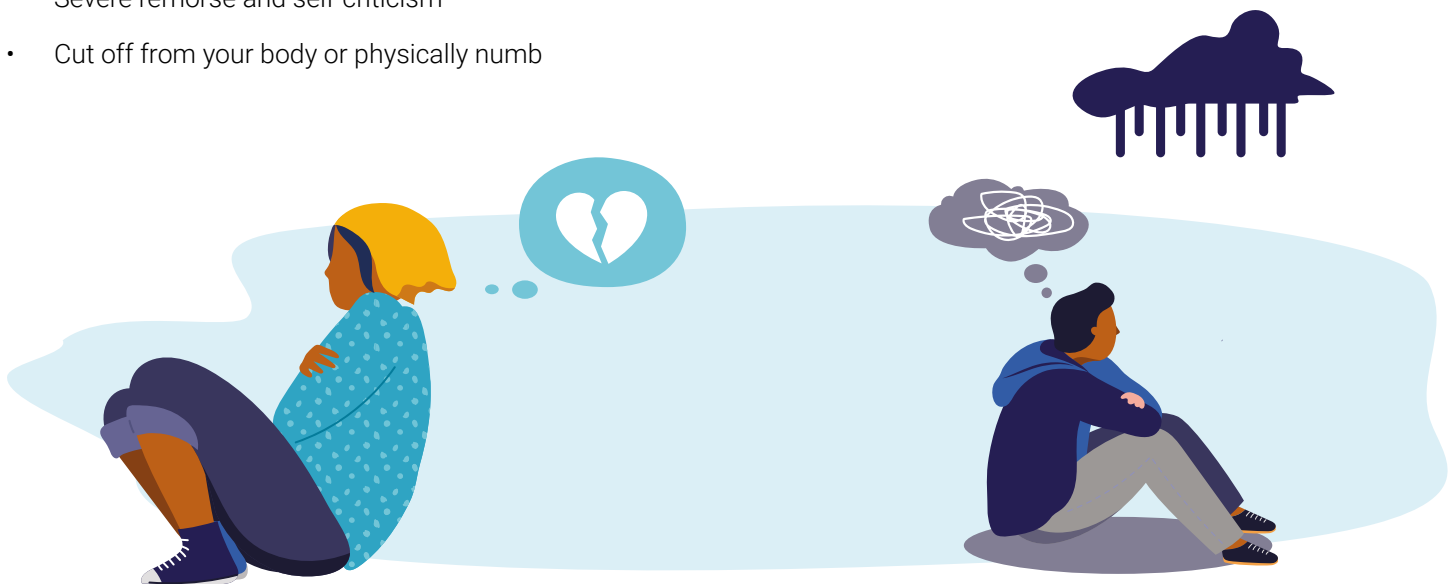
Suicidal ideation can be caused by circumstances such as academic or work pressures, stress, grief or social difficulties. It could also be a symptom of an existing or undiagnosed mental health disorder, or a side effect to medication.

Although there are many factors that could contribute to suicidal feelings, it is common to not be able to pinpoint a clear cause. While some people will be able to discuss their thoughts and feelings openly, it is important to remember that some people will not be able to talk about what they are experiencing.

If someone feels suicidal, their feelings may become more intense if they drink alcohol, take drugs or have trouble sleeping.

People can be more vulnerable to suicide if they have:

- Attempted suicide before
- Been bereaved by suicide
- Self-harmed in the past. Self-harm is not the same as feeling suicidal, but statistics show that those who have self-harmed are at a higher risk of suicidal thoughts.



## Why you should ask if someone is struggling with suicidal thoughts.

Unfortunately, there is still a stigma around mental health and suicide. This can make open communication even more challenging which, in turn, increases feelings of isolation.

While asking direct questions about suicidal feelings might feel uncomfortable, it's necessary to encourage honest conversation. Discussions can help those struggling to feel heard and understood, and help you to identify how best to support them.

Research confirms that those that speak openly about their suicidal feelings, have a decreased likelihood to act on them.

Ask simple, direct questions.

Remember, the earlier someone confirms how they are feeling, the quicker they can get the support they need.



## How can you help?

When somebody is struggling with suicidal ideation, talking to someone who they trust is often their first step towards getting help. It is essential that open communication is kept a priority and support systems remain in place.

- Ask open questions. These are questions that invite someone to say more than 'yes' or 'no'. Try asking: "How have you been feeling?" or "What happened next?"
- Give them time. You might feel anxious to hear their answers, but it helps if you let them take the time they need.

- Take them seriously. It is best to assume that a person is telling the truth about feeling suicidal.
- Do not judge them. Although you may feel shocked, upset, or overwhelmed, it is important not to pass blame or judgement for how they are feeling.
- Seek further support. Somebody suffering from suicidal ideation needs help. Visit [alexpantonfoundation.ky](http://alexpantonfoundation.ky) for our full list of helpful resources.

"Reach out to a loved one. People do care. People want to help and they want you to feel better – they want you to share in their lives."

- Chairperson of the Alex Panton Foundation

## Are you struggling? Where to go to find help.

If you are experiencing ongoing suicidal feelings, it's important to know where to seek help.

- Making an appointment with your General Practitioner is a good starting point for advice, referrals, medication and specialist services.
- Contact the Department of Counselling services at 949-8789, or visit their website: [www.dcs.gov.ky](http://www.dcs.gov.ky)
- Contact HSA Mental Health Services 949-5600, or visit their website [www.hsa.ky/services](http://www.hsa.ky/services)
- If approaching a medical professional seems overwhelming, try an online community such as: Elefriends, Gender Trust, Mood Juice or SidebySide

### Getting help in an emergency

If you don't feel you can keep yourself or others safe, seek immediate help and dial 911.

Support systems come in many different forms. The Alex Panton Foundation (APF) has put together a list of useful resources, which includes support groups and professional clinics, on our website.

Visit [alexpantonfoundation.ky](http://alexpantonfoundation.ky) to find out more.