

A guide to **RECOGNISING AND MANAGING SUICIDAL THOUGHTS**



Developed as part of
ICMR's Multistate Implementation Research Study on Improving
Mental Well Being Among School and College Students





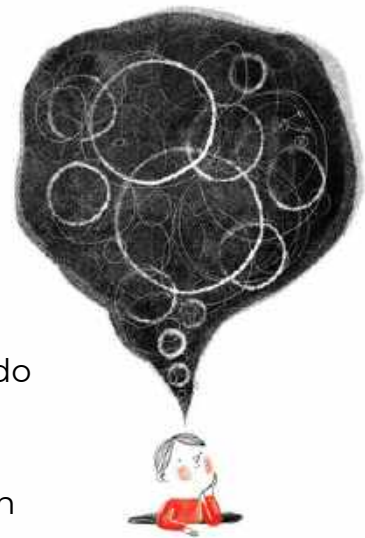
about

RECOGNISING AND MANAGING SUICIDAL THOUGHTS

Sometimes, when we are balancing multiple stresses, roles and responsibilities, life might start feeling heavy. You wake up, and things that once made you happy, may not seem to anymore. Maybe you feel exhausted even though you just slept, or you fake a smile to get through the day. Everyone has low moments- days when nothing seems to go right, when sadness lingers, when it feels like no one understands. During these times, dark thoughts can creep in, whispering things like:

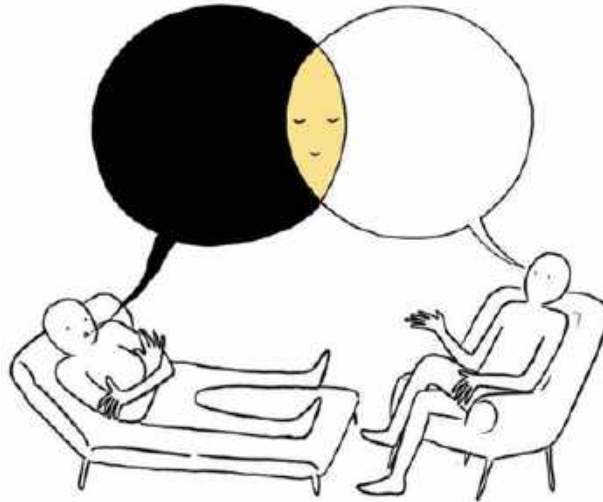
- "I wish I could just disappear."
- "Nobody would even notice if I were gone."
- "Things would have been so much better if I was never born."

These thoughts can be scary, and one of them might even be about ending your life. If you have ever had thoughts like that, you are NOT alone. These feelings do not mean you are "broken" or "weak". They mean you are struggling, and struggling means you are human. Talking about suicide can feel awkward, heavy, or even scary. But the truth is, keeping silent about it does not make it go away. In fact, the more we talk about it, the more we can help ourselves and others. Suicidal thoughts may not mean you actually want to die. Most of the time, they mean you want the pain to stop. And there are ways to make that happen without giving up on life.



Suicidal thoughts are like a bully trying to convince you that nothing will change. But that voice does not have to win. You have power, and you have options. Let us explore them together.

The Importance of Talking About Suicide and Suicidal Thoughts



Keeping things bottled up can feel like shaking a soda can- eventually, it explodes. Talking about your thoughts and feelings lets out the pressure. Whether it is with a friend, a trusted adult, or a counselor, expressing these thoughts can be the first step toward finding relief and solutions. When we talk about suicide, we break the stigma. It helps others realize they're not alone either, and it makes getting help easier for everyone.

What Is Suicide and Suicidal Thoughts?

Suicide is when someone intentionally takes their own life. Suicidal thoughts, or suicidal ideation, happen when someone considers or imagines ending their life. These thoughts can be fleeting or persistent, and they do not always mean someone will act on them. But they do signal deep pain that needs attention and care.



The Suicide Scale

<p>1: I am so happy that I will literally go insane if the happiness is sustained for any length of time.</p>  <p>This is almost too much joy... my abs hurt from laughing!</p>	<p>2: I am feeling pretty rad. I vaguely recall times I have been unhappy, but it feels like distant memories now. Things are looking up!</p> 	<p>3: It is not the best day of my life. I have stuff on my mind, but I don't think of suicide, except for when that one weird friend brings up stupid hypotheticals...</p>  <p>okay okay But!!! What if the bear ate off your arms after eating all the people you care about? You aren't really leaving me any options. If I can't kill the bear... I guess I just die.</p>
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The Difference Between Suicide and Self-Harm

Many people confuse suicide and self-harm, but they are not the same thing. Understanding the difference is important because it helps in finding the right kind of support.

What is Self-Harm?

Self-harm (also called non-suicidal self-injury or NSSI) is when a person deliberately harms themselves as a way to cope with overwhelming emotions, stress, or pain. This can include behaviors like:

- Cutting or scratching the skin
- Burning or hitting oneself
- Pulling out hair
- Banging one's head against a wall
- Picking at wounds to prevent healing
- Inserting objects under the skin

Self-harm is usually not done with the intention of taking one's life. Instead, it's often a way to release emotional pain, regain a sense of control, or express feelings that feel too difficult to put into words.

How is Suicide Different?

While self-harm is a coping mechanism, suicide is about wanting to permanently end one's life. Someone who contemplates suicide may feel hopeless, like things will never get better. They might make preparations, withdraw from loved ones, or express a desire to die.



Can Self-Harm Lead to Suicide?

Yes, but not always. While self-harm is not the same as a suicide attempt, people who self-harm may be at a higher risk of suicidal thoughts if their pain goes unaddressed. If you or someone you know is self-harming, it's a sign that support is needed. Talking to a trusted person or professional can help develop healthier coping strategies.

Recognizing Suicidal Thoughts and Warning Signs

Suicidal thoughts do not always look the same for everyone. Sometimes they are loud and overwhelming, and other times they creep in slowly. Knowing the warning signs can help you understand when you or someone you know needs support.

In Yourself:

Suicidal thoughts can show in different ways. You might **think**:

"I wish I could disappear."

(Thoughts of helplessness)

"Nothing will ever get better."

(Thoughts of hopelessness)

"Everyone would be better off without me."

(Thoughts of being a burden on others)

"I just do not care anymore."

(Thoughts of apathy)

It's not just thoughts. You might also notice certain changes in your behaviour and habits:



Sleeping too much or too little



Losing interest in things you used to enjoy



Feeling exhausted or empty



Acting risky or reckless, like skipping school, using substances, or self-harming



Isolating yourself from friends and family



Feeling trapped, like there is no way out of a situation



Sudden mood swings- from extreme sadness to unusual calmness

In Others:

If a friend is struggling, you might notice:

- They withdraw from social activities
- They talk about feeling hopeless or like a burden
- They suddenly give away important belongings
- They make comments like, “I do not see the point anymore”
- They stop taking care of themselves (not showering, skipping meals)
- They engage in reckless or self-destructive behavior
- They express feeling trapped or like they have no future
- They start saying goodbye to people as if they will not see them again



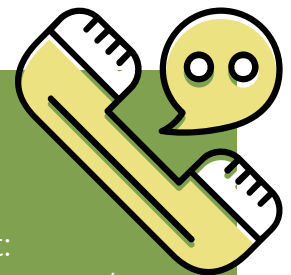
If you recognize these signs in yourself or someone else, it is important to take them seriously and reach out for support.

Crisis Helplines and Emergency Support

In moments of intense distress or suicidal thoughts, reach out:

- **TeleMANAS:** 14416 or [1800 891 4416](tel:18008914416) (Free, multiple languages, 24/7)
- **iCall** – 9152987821 (Free and confidential, Mon-Sat, 10 AM–8 PM)
- **AASRA** – 91-9820466726 (24/7 suicide prevention)
- **Vandrevala Foundation Helpline** – 1860 266 2345 or 1800 233 3330
- **Samaritans Mumbai** – 91-84229 84528/29/30
(7 PM – 9 PM daily, English, Hindi)

Save at least two helplines in your phone. Share them with friends too—you never know who might need them.



Why Do We Experience Suicidal Thoughts?

There is no single reason why someone might have suicidal thoughts, but some common factors include:



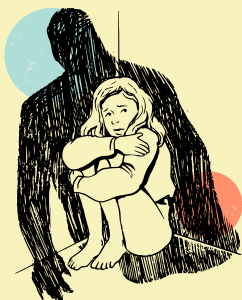
Academic Stress & Pressure: Feeling like grades define your worth or fearing failure.

Social Isolation or Bullying: Feeling left out, misunderstood, or targeted



Family Issues or Trauma: Conflict at home, abuse, or major life changes.

Mental Health Conditions: Depression, anxiety, or other mental health conditions.



History of Abuse: Having experienced any form of sexual, physical or emotional abuse may create feelings of helplessness and shame, leading the individual to feel trapped.

Feelings of Hopelessness or Failure: The belief that things will never change (even though they can and do!).



Let's Bust Myths!

There are many misconceptions about suicide that can make it harder for people to seek help. Let's bust some of the most common myths:

MYTH

Talking about suicide puts the idea into someone's head.



Only people with mental illnesses consider suicide.



People who talk about suicide are just seeking attention.



Once someone decides to die, nothing can stop them.

FACT

Talking about suicide does not cause it- it actually helps one explore their emotions. Open conversations allow people to express their feelings and get support.



While mental health conditions increase the risk, thoughts of suicide can affect anyone, including those who have never been diagnosed with a mental illness.



If someone talks about suicide, they are asking for help. It is important to listen and take them seriously.



Such thoughts are temporary, and with the right support, people can recover and find hope again.

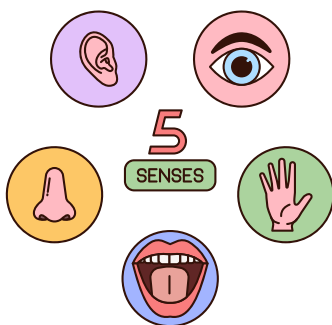
Immediate Steps to Take When Experiencing Suicidal Thoughts

If you're struggling with thoughts of suicide, know this: you do not have to go through it alone. Here are some steps that might help:



Reach Out for Help: Talk to someone- a friend, a trusted adult, a counselor, or a helpline.

Create a Safety Plan: List emergency contacts, safe places to go, and comforting activities.



Try Grounding & Coping Techniques:

- 5-4-3-2-1 method:** Name 5 things you can see, 4 you can touch, 3 you can hear, 2 you can smell, and 1 you can taste.
- Deep breathing:** Inhale for 4 seconds, hold for 4, exhale for 4.
- Distraction:** Listen to music, draw, journal, or go for a walk.

Creating a Safety Plan

A safety plan is a personal guide to help you cope with suicidal thoughts and stay safe. Here's a structured template:

Warning Signs: List thoughts, emotions, or situations that make you feel worse.

Coping Strategies: Identify healthy ways to manage distress, such as:

- **Sensory grounding:** Holding ice, using a stress ball, or listening to calming sounds.
- **Physical movement:** Stretching, dancing, or squeezing a pillow.
- **Creative expression:** Writing, drawing, playing music, or making a gratitude list.
- **Breathing exercises:** Trying deep belly breathing or the 4-4-4 technique.
- **Self-soothing activities:** Taking a warm shower, sipping tea, or wrapping yourself in a blanket.

People to Reach Out To: List trusted friends, family members, or mentors who you can talk to.

Professional Support: Write down emergency helplines, therapists, or counselors who can help.

Safe Places: Identify places where you feel safe and comforted (e.g., a friend's house, library, nature spot).

Reasons to Stay Alive: Create a visual or written reminder of things that bring you joy, hope, or purpose.

Emergency Steps: Have a clear action plan for crisis moments—who to call, where to go, and what to do.



Long-Term Coping Strategies:

- 1 **Address Negative Thought Patterns:** Challenge negative thoughts, such as “I am not worthy” or “Nothing will ever get better” and try to replace them with realistic, hopeful perspectives.

Rewriting Your Story



Negative thoughts can feel like the final chapter of a tragic book, but in reality, they are just part of a longer, evolving story. This activity helps reframe suicidal thoughts by transforming them into a personal narrative of strength and resilience.

1. Title Your Story

- Imagine your life as a book. If today's chapter had a title based on your current emotions, what would it be? (Example: "Lost in the Fog," "The Heavy Backpack," "Nowhere to Turn")

2. Describe Today's Chapter (The Present Moment)

- Write a paragraph or a few sentences about how you are feeling right now. Use metaphors if it helps. (Example: "It feels like I'm stuck in a storm with no umbrella. The rain does not stop, and I cannot see the way out.")
- Be honest, raw, and unfiltered. This is your space.

3. Rewind to a Past Chapter of Strength

- Think about a time in your life when you overcame something difficult. Maybe you pushed through school stress, a friendship fallout, or a time when you thought things would not get better- but they did.
- Write about that moment. What helped you get through it? What did you learn?

4. Introduce a Plot Twist

- Now, imagine that today's chapter is not the end- just a turning point in your story.
- Rewrite your current struggles with a shift in perspective. Example:
 - Instead of: "I am completely alone," try: "Right now, I feel alone, but that does not mean I always will be."
 - Instead of: "I cannot do this anymore," try: "This is really hard, but I have survived hard things before."



5. Write a Letter from Your Future Self

- Imagine your future self, a version of you that has made it through this pain. What would they say to you now?
- Write yourself a letter from that perspective. (Example: "Hey, I know it feels unbearable right now, but you are stronger than you think. You are yet to see how this chapter ends. Keep turning the pages.")

6. Create a Positive Affirmation Bookmark

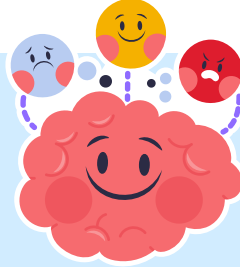
- From your writing, pull out one sentence that gives you hope or reminds you of your strength.
- Write it on a sticky note, a piece of paper, or as your
- phone wallpaper—somewhere you can see it every day.



2 . Building Skills for Emotional Regulation:

Regulation means the ability to manage intense emotions in a way that prevents them from overwhelming you. Learn to manage strong emotions through therapy, journaling, or practicing self-reflection.

Emotional Regulation Skills



The "Name It to Tame It" Strategy

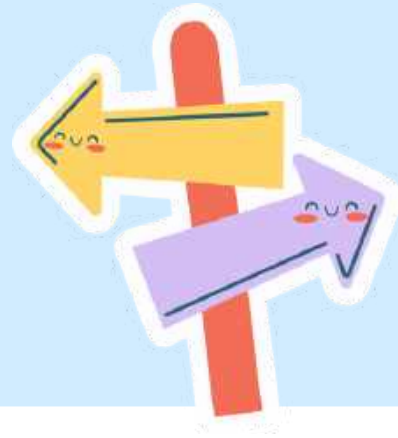
- When emotions feel chaotic, naming them can help calm them.
- Say out loud or write: "I am feeling [angry/sad/frustrated], and that is okay."
- This shifts your brain from reacting emotionally to processing logically.

Temperature Shift

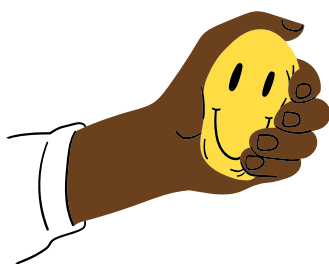
- Lowering body temperature can reduce emotional intensity.
- Try holding ice cubes, splashing cold water on your face, or stepping outside for fresh air.

Opposite Action Strategy

- If you feel like withdrawing, do the opposite—talk to someone or go outside.
- If you feel restless, engage in something calming like deep breathing or journaling.



- **Mindfulness Techniques:** Meditation, deep breathing, or practicing presence can reduce stress and anxiety.



- **Sensory Grounding:** Engage your senses—listen to calming music, touch a soft object, or eat a favorite snack mindfully.

Self-Soothing with the Five Senses

Create Your Own Sensory "Survival Kit"



- ① Find a small box, pouch, or bag. This will be your Emergency Grounding Kit that you can carry or keep in a safe place.
- ② Fill it with objects that stimulate each of your five senses in a calming way.
- ③ Whenever you feel overwhelmed, take a moment to pause, breathe, and pick one item from the kit to focus on.
- ④ Close your eyes and engage your senses one by one, describing the experience to yourself like an explorer.
 - Sight: A small photo of a happy memory, a colorful object, or a calming picture.
 - Sound: A playlist of calming songs or a small music box.
 - Touch: A smooth stone, soft fabric, a stress ball, or a textured object.
 - Smell: A scented candle, incense stick, essential oil, or a tea bag with a soothing aroma.
 - Taste: A mint, a piece of chocolate, or simple nuts.

⑤ Extra Step: Give Each Item a Meaning

- Write a small note or affirmation for each item in your kit. For example:
 - "This soft cloth reminds me of warmth and comfort."
 - "This seashell reminds me that life is vast and ever-changing, like the ocean."
 - "This music reminds me that emotions are temporary and always come to an end, just like a song."

- **Self-Care:** Engage in enjoyable or productive activities to counteract depressive feelings and regain motivation.



Immediate Steps to Take If a Friend Is Having Suicidal Thoughts

If someone you know is struggling, here is how to support them:

1. **Start a Conversation:** “Hey, I noticed you have not been yourself lately. Want to talk?”
2. **Listen Without Judging:** Avoid phrases like “Just cheer up” or “Others have it worse.” Instead, say things like, “I hear you” or “That sounds really hard.”
3. **Encourage Professional Help:** Thoughts of self harm or suicide are important indicators that someone needs urgent professional support. Encourage them to reach out to a counselor, teacher, or helpline number.
4. **Know When to Seek Immediate Help:** If a friend mentions a plan to hurt themselves, inform a trusted adult, ensure the friend is accompanied by an adult and not left alone and call emergency services.



Remember



You are Not Alone: There are people who care about you even when it feels like no one understands. You do not have to handle this all alone.

Feelings Are Temporary: While they feel endless, emotions are temporary and often pass. Reaching out for support is a brave act of helping oneself.

Help is Available: Reaching out can feel overwhelming, but it is the most crucial step in helping yourself.



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