



Finding the Words for Difficult Conversations

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Each year, more than [700,000](#) people across the world die by suicide.

As the fourth leading cause of death among [15-29](#) year-olds and the single biggest killer of men [under 45](#), suicide is a serious public health issue. While it's true that mental health disorders such as depression and addiction can put people more at risk of suicide, it can in fact affect any individual, of any gender, from any background.

In order to raise awareness around suicide and how we can all work together to prevent it, Samaritans hold an annual campaign on 10 September in which they encourage world leaders to make more ambitious plans to prevent suicide.

With this year's **World Suicide Prevention Day** theme highlighting the importance of using the right language to break down stigma and inspire honest communication, it's a great opportunity to ensure we're creating a safe environment for people to open up with the words we use.

Before we look at the right way to approach difficult conversations of this nature, let's examine the warning signs that suggest someone might be contemplating suicide. An at-risk individual may:

- Threaten to hurt themselves or threaten to end their life
- Talk about death often
- Make preparations to take their life, such as collecting medications or researching suicide methods online
- Say phrases like "I wish I'd never been born" or "I'd be better off dead"
- Express a sense of hopelessness for the future
- Imply they are a burden
- Become withdrawn from society
- Appear to be 'getting their affairs in order' by making a will or selling personal possessions
- Start making unexpected goodbye calls to friends and family
- Appear calm, happy, or at peace all of a sudden

If you spot any of these warning signs in someone you know, it's important to encourage them to open up about how they're feeling. But it's also important to know how to approach these conversations in a safe way.

Share resources: Knowing what to say to someone suffering from suicidal thoughts is extremely difficult – especially if you've never dealt with a similar situation before. That's why it's a good idea to arm yourself with various resources before starting the conversation. You can gather information on local support groups, online services, and mental health helplines to connect the

individual to professional help and reassure yourself that they are in safe hands.

Right time. Right place: Choose a calm, quiet, and confidential space to start your conversation. You could arrange to visit them at their home if that's where they feel safest, or opt to take a walk together in a tranquil location. Just be sure that, wherever you go, you are able to give them your full attention without distractions.

Don't judge: When a person is struggling, an empathic ear can make all the difference. Make sure you're listening closely to what the person is telling you and try not to interrupt, dismiss, or judge what they are saying. Instead, ask open-ended questions to avoid "yes/no" answers and encourage honest conversation. Some examples include:

- How are you?
- How have you been feeling lately?
- Is anything bothering you at the moment?
- You don't seem like yourself – can I help?
- Would you like to chat about how you're feeling?

Let them know you're there – As with listening, letting someone know you are there to support them can be hugely beneficial. Reassure them that they can reach out to you when they need to talk and offer to accompany them to any doctor's appointments or support groups they might be thinking of attending. Simply knowing that someone is there can be a shining light of hope in the darkest of times.

Check in – After you've had that important conversation, it's vital to keep the line of contact open. This will help people who are struggling feel supported and less alone while they seek further support from a professional mental health counsellor. Checking in can be as simple as sending a quick text asking how they are and letting them know you're there if they need you.

It's easy to feel like you're out of your depth when talking about such a serious issue as suicide. However, it's worth keeping in mind that encouraging conversations of this nature is vital to ending the stigma that surrounds suicide and mental health concerns. Above all else, it could serve as a lifeline to someone who is struggling.

Vivup's Employee Assistance Programme is here to help

If your employer offers Vivup's Employee Assistance Programme, there are lots of useful resources and downloadable workbooks to help you approach difficult conversations in a positive, proactive, and safe way. You can also access a 24-hour telephone helpline for responsive, confidential, and totally independent advice should you or a colleague need mental health support.

Sources

[Suicide \(who.int\)](#)

[Why more men than women die by suicide - BBC Future](#)

[A guide on how to approach difficult conversations | Heads Together](#)

[Suicide incidence :: Zero Suicide Alliance](#)

[We Need to Talk About Suicide - Pine Rest Newsroom](#)

[World Suicide Prevention Day | Campaigns | Samaritans](#)

[Suicide warning signs \(merseycare.nhs.uk\)](#)