

Coping with Thoughts of Suicide During COVID-19

Why might thoughts of suicide occur during the COVID-19 outbreak?

The outbreak of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) has disrupted everyday life. It is normal to feel anxious, upset, or even angry during this time of uncertainty. Concerns about loved ones, fears of disease, loneliness and isolation, and economic instability can feel overwhelming, especially for anyone already struggling with their mental wellbeing. But for some, these worries can lead to depression, anxiety, substance use, and other behavioral health challenges that increase the risk for suicide.

Coping Strategies for Thoughts of Suicide

1

Be compassionate.

Be kind to yourself and focus on the things you can control.

There are many things you cannot control right now, and that is okay. Remind yourself that you are doing the best you can every day. It's okay if you are not accomplishing as much as you'd like to right now.

2

Stay connected.

Reach out to friends and family regularly.

Call, text, or video chat your loved ones at least once a day to talk with them about how you're feeling. Use this opportunity to check in on how they are doing too.

3

Seek professional help.

Talk to a mental health professional.

There are some things we can't tackle alone. Many therapists are still offering services via telehealth for new and existing patients.

4

Reduce access to lethal means.

Access to lethal means can increase someone's risk for suicide.

Safely store firearms using cable locks, trigger locks, and safes. Keep medications locked and secured.

5

Contact crisis support.

Call specialists can provide you with support to get through a crisis.

If you or a loved one are experiencing a suicide crisis, contact a crisis helpline or 911 immediately. Many crisis services operate 24/7.

6

Create a safety plan.

A safety plan will remind you of strategies to get through a crisis.

A safety plan is a list of warning signs, internal coping strategies, and professional and social supports. You can create a safety plan in the My3 App or here: <https://bit.ly/2wFm0un>.



Warning Signs of Suicide

How do I know if someone might be thinking about suicide?

Look for these warning signs that someone might be experiencing a suicidal crisis:

- Talking about wanting to die or kill themselves
- Looking for a way to kill oneself (e.g. asking about guns in the house, looking up methods online)
- Talking about feeling hopeless or having no reason to live
- Talking about feeling trapped or in unbearable pain
- Talking about being a burden to others
- Increased use of drugs or alcohol
- Behaving carelessly
- Sleeping too little or too much
- Withdrawing or isolating
- Displaying extreme mood swings
- Visiting or calling loved ones to say goodbye

Helping Someone with Thoughts of Suicide

What can I do to help someone who is thinking about suicide?

Friends and family members are often the first to recognize that a loved one is in emotional distress. If you notice that someone you care about is exhibiting any of the warning signs for suicide, have an open and honest conversation with them. Ask them directly, "**Are you thinking about suicide?**" Listen to their response empathetically and without judgment.

What if they say yes?

If they say they are having thoughts of suicide, connect them with available resources, such as crisis services and mental health professionals. Follow up with the person, and check in with them regularly.

If you believe the person at-risk is in imminent danger, contact 911 immediately. Ensure that they are not left alone. Stay in contact with them, even virtually, until more help can arrive.

Resources

Maryland's Crisis Helpline

Call 211 and press 1, text 898-211, or visit pressone.211md.org.

MY3 App

Develop a suicide safety plan using the MY3 app at my3app.org.

Psychology Today

Find a therapist that offers telehealth at psychologytoday.com/us/therapists.

