



# How to Support Survivors of Suicide Attempts

Almost 50,000 people die by suicide every year in the U.S. Michigan's death by suicide rate is higher than the national average, with many counties in Northern Michigan experiencing suicide rates over twice the national average. In addition to those who die by suicide every year, millions more people seriously think about, plan, and attempt suicide. As a concerned family member, friend, or community member, you may wonder how to help those who are thinking about suicide or who have tried to end their life.

## How can I help?

**Tell the person you care.** Most people who think about or attempt suicide feel isolated and lonely. Communicating that you appreciate having that person in your life can make a significant difference.

**Listen.** The person may want to share their experience, thoughts, or feelings with you. When listening, focus on understanding their story without trying to fix the problem. Accepting what the person shares with you, without giving advice or avoiding the sad parts, can help the person to feel like you are someone they can trust.

**Ask what you can do to be supportive.** This might include helping the person find a mental health provider, make a self-care plan or cook a meal. When struggling emotionally, it can be difficult for a person to figure out what they need help with. Offering options for help can be useful.

**Help the person make a safety plan.** People who survive suicide attempts benefit from developing a plan of what to do in case they start to think about suicide again. Safety plans might include removing firearms from the person's home, throwing out potentially harmful substances, or making a list of support people they can contact.

**Encourage the person to talk to mental health professionals.** After a suicide attempt, mental health professionals such as psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, or certified peer specialists can help the person process their feelings and determine a safe way forward.

**Keep in regular communication.** Since people who think about suicide often feel alone, it is helpful to show consistent care through communication such as a daily text, weekly call, or other regular plans to meet virtually or in person.

## What else can I do to support a suicide attempt survivor?

**Assist the person in connecting with their community.** Help the person to think about people who have been supportive in the past and people who might be willing to be supportive now. Assist the person in reaching out to the identified support people to increase the person's feeling of belonging and support.

**Acknowledge your limits.** Share with the person what you are willing and able to do to help. If the person asks you to do something you cannot do or feel uncomfortable doing, it is okay to decline. Instead, you can help the person to identify someone else who can help with that task, or you could offer an alternative option that you are able and willing to help with.

**Take care of yourself.** Helping someone who is thinking about suicide can be hard. Staying

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emotionally and mentally well requires prioritizing self-care. Self-care might include talking to a professional or trusted friend, spending time doing enjoyable activities, engaging in regular physical activity and getting enough sleep.

### What if the person does not want help or does not want to talk about it?

**That is okay.** You can tell the person you care about them and let them know that you are there for them if they want to talk later.

**Keep spending time with the person in other ways.** Even if the conversation or activities are not related to the person's wellbeing, simply spend time with the person being a friend or family member to them.

### What other resources could be helpful?

A Journey Toward Health and Hope is a free handbook by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration for suicide attempt survivors to guide their recovery process: [samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/sma15-4419.pdf](https://samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/sma15-4419.pdf).

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention has many resources about how to support someone after an attempt, as well as resources for survivors: [afsp.org](https://afsp.org).

The 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline is available as a resource for people in distress as well as their friends and family members. 988 crisis counselors can be reached by call, text, or chat at [988lifeline.org](https://988lifeline.org), 24/7.

These articles by authors at Michigan State University Extension also provide more information about suicide prevention and support:

- [canr.msu.edu/news/how-to-support-someone-through-suicide-grief](https://canr.msu.edu/news/how-to-support-someone-through-suicide-grief)
- [canr.msu.edu/news/when-you-re-left-behind](https://canr.msu.edu/news/when-you-re-left-behind)
- [canr.msu.edu/news/is-988-the-right-resource-for-you-understanding-mental-health-crises-and-finding-the-help-you-need](https://canr.msu.edu/news/is-988-the-right-resource-for-you-understanding-mental-health-crises-and-finding-the-help-you-need)

### Need help now?

If you or someone you know is experiencing symptoms of depression or have suicidal thoughts, reach out for help:

- **Call 911 for an emergency.** If the situation is potentially life-threatening, get immediate emergency assistance by calling 9-1-1.
- **988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline.** Call or text 988 or chat with a crisis counselor online at [988lifeline.org](https://988lifeline.org).

### References

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