

# Suicide First Aid Guidelines for People from Immigrant and Refugee Backgrounds

## SUICIDE CAN BE PREVENTED

Most suicidal people do not want to die, they just do not want to live with the pain they are feeling. Helping a suicidal person talk about their thoughts and feelings can help save a life.

### HOW DO I KNOW?

A suicidal person may not ask for help directly, but they are likely to show certain warning signs.

#### WATCH FOR

**WITHDRAWING** from friends, family or the community

Suddenly becoming **VERY SAD**

#### Expressing in words or actions:

a big change in **MOOD, BEHAVIOUR** or **APPEARANCE**

**DISTRESS ABOUT INTRUSIVE MEMORIES** of past traumatic events

**FEELINGS OF HOPELESSNESS**

**STRONG SENSE OF FEELING ALONE** and cut off, even if surrounded by family or friends

Having **NO REASON TO LIVE** or **NO PURPOSE IN LIFE**

feeling that **DEATH IS AN HONOURABLE SOLUTION** to their situation

**NO INTEREST** in or **PLANS FOR THE FUTURE**

**FEELINGS OF GUILT OR SHAME**, or belief of being a burden to others

**FEAR OF BEING INVOLUNTARILY REMOVED** or returned to home country, especially if there is a risk of torture or death

Feeling that their **LIFE HAS BEEN A FAILURE**

**FEELING TRAPPED**, like there is no way out

### HOW CAN I HELP?

Act quickly if you think someone is considering suicide, even if you have only a mild suspicion. Choose a private place to talk with the person and allow time to talk about your concerns.

#### ASK ABOUT THOUGHTS OF SUICIDE

**"Are you having thoughts of suicide?"** or **"Are you thinking about killing yourself?"**

Be mindful of how you ask.

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Asking the person about suicidal thoughts will give them the chance to talk about their problems and show them that somebody cares.  
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Be supportive and understanding of the person, and listen to them with all your attention, encouraging them to do most of the talking.

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If the person is having trouble communicating in your language, you should speak slowly, use simple words, check for understanding and, if necessary, repeat what you have said.

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Do not let the fear of saying the wrong words or of not saying the perfect words stop you from encouraging the person to talk.

Once you have established that a suicide risk is present, you need to take action to keep the person safe.

The suicidal person should not be left on their own. Make sure that potentially harmful items are not available to them.

Remind the person that suicidal thoughts don't have to be acted on, and that even though these thoughts may feel like they will never go away, they are usually temporary.

Assure the person that there is support available. Ask the person if they would like you to contact someone for them such as a friend, family member or trusted religious, spiritual or community leader.

Encourage the person to get suitable professional help as soon as possible.

Find out about local services for people from immigrant and refugee backgrounds, including gender-specific services.

**TAKE ALL THOUGHTS OF SUICIDE SERIOUSLY AND TAKE ACTION!**

### OTHER WARNING SIGNS

A person may threaten to hurt or kill themselves, or say that they wish to die, verbally (speaking) or in writing.

A person may behave in ways that are life-threatening or dangerous.

A person may try to set their affairs and relationships in order.

If you have noticed some of these warning signs and you are concerned a person may be at risk of suicide, you need to talk to them about your concerns. Warning signs for suicide may also be different among cultures or their expressions might vary.

The complete guidelines can be downloaded from MHIMA ([www.mhima.org.au](http://www.mhima.org.au)) and GCMHU websites ([cimh.unimelb.edu.au](http://cimh.unimelb.edu.au)).

All Mental Health First Aid guidelines can be downloaded from <https://mhfainternational.org/guidelines/>

