



# Recognising the signs of suicide

## MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT FROM TAL AND ASSURE PROGRAMS



Every day in Australia, eight adults die by suicide, with death rates three times higher for men than women. For every death, it's estimated a further 30 people attempt to end their lives<sup>1</sup>.

Every life lost to suicide can have devastating consequences for the families, friends and colleagues left behind.

While there have been positive advances in mental health and suicide awareness in recent years, suicide remains a leading cause of death.

In this guide, Assure Programs provides information to help you recognise the signs if those around us are not well, ways to have a conversation and some of the support that's available to people in need.

### HELPING YOU STAY POSITIVE DURING COVID-19

As a leader in the life insurance industry, TAL has always been focused on helping Australians through life's biggest challenges. COVID-19 has made many of us realise we live in an unpredictable world. As the situation continues, we may be feeling increased uncertainty and potentially a sense of loss.

That's why we've partnered with Assure Programs to provide resources, tools and expertise to super fund members who might need some extra support with the challenges of the current crisis.

### ABOUT TAL

TAL is a leading Australian life insurer, helping people protect what matters most in their lives for 150 years. Together with its partners, TAL provides life insurance and disability benefits to over 4 million Australians and in 2019, paid over \$2.3 billion in claims to more than 34,000 customers. TAL partners with leading superannuation funds to provide members with options to protect their future choices with insurance through super.

### ABOUT ASSURE PROGRAMS

Assure Programs is a leading mental health organisation with an extensive network of experienced psychologists and specialists. With a holistic model of counselling, wellbeing coaching and evidence-based development programs, Assure Programs helps individuals, teams and organisations across the entire mental wellbeing spectrum.



## Recognise the signs

Someone who may be contemplating suicide will usually give some indicators – known as ‘suicide warning signs’ – to those they’re in touch with. This is often a way of showing that they’re troubled and may be reaching out for help. Suicide prevention starts with recognising these warning signs and taking them seriously.

Ways you may be able to identify that someone might be considering suicide include:

- **Physical changes:** loss of interest in appearance or personal hygiene, weight gain or loss, or sudden or extreme changes.
- **Significant life changes:** this might be a relationship break-up, losing their job, a recent diagnosis for a serious health issue, death of a loved one, or someone else in their life recently attempting or completing a suicide.
- **Direct or vague comments about wanting to die:** comments such as “I wish I wasn’t here,” “I’d like it to just end,” “I want this all to be over”, “I am such a burden,” “I want to go to sleep and never wake up” or “My family would be better off without me.”
- **Current mental health or behavioural issues:** an existing mental health condition, alcohol or drug misuse, withdrawal or emotional breakdown, signs of recent self-harm or prior suicidal behaviour.



## Prepare for the conversation

If you’ve noticed that someone doesn’t seem themselves and you’re worried, you could plan to have a conversation with them about it. Here are some things to think about before you speak to them.

- Are you in the right headspace to have a conversation about this?
- Have you allowed enough time to have this conversation?
- Are you prepared that they may disclose that they aren’t doing well, and have you thought about how you might respond?
- Have you accepted that you cannot ‘fix’ someone and it’s not your responsibility to become a counsellor or solve another’s problems?
- Are you going into the conversation with an open mind, ready to listen to the person and understand their point of view?
- Do you have resources and referral information on hand, such as a GP or Lifeline?

You don’t need to be an expert in mental health to have this conversation. Anyone can talk to someone they’re concerned about and help them access help. If you don’t feel able to talk to the person right now, you could confide in someone who also knows the person you’re worried about and tell them your concerns as they may be able to have the conversation instead.



## Talking about suicide

It’s important to ask directly about suicidal thoughts and what suicide plans the person has. Talking about suicide won’t put the idea in their head but will encourage them to talk about their feelings in a safe environment. If you’re prepared to have the conversation, here are some suggestions to consider.

- “I’m worried about you. Have you been having thoughts of suicide?”
- “What you are telling me is concerning. I have to ask, are you thinking about killing yourself?”
- “Sometimes when people say things like that they can be thinking about suicide. Are you?”
- “Based some of what you’ve shared with me today, I do have to ask about your current risk of suicide. Are you currently thinking about suicide?”

Throughout the conversation, listen with an open mind and try not to disagree with them if they’re saying things you think are untrue. Instead, empathise and clarify any points you’re unsure of to make sure you’ve understood what they’re saying. Remember, you don’t need to solve their problem; you just need to give them the opportunity to open up and then support them in getting professional help.

## Actions to provide support

The actions you may take to support the person may include some, or all, of the following things.

- **Act immediately:** take warning signs seriously. If you're concerned that they're thinking of harming themselves now or in the near future, call 000 or take them to a hospital emergency department. Also remove any available means of suicide, including alcohol, drugs (including medications), weapons and even access to a car, if needed.
- **Acknowledge your reaction:** you might panic initially or want to ignore the situation. Don't ignore the signs. Instead, get support from others if needed.
- **Write a safety plan:** this is a list of steps for if/when the person is feeling low or suicidal again. You can make the plan together with the person in need and others close to them.
  - Step 1** Use healthy, self-soothing activities to make the person feel good. This might include taking a bath, going for a walk, reading a book, having a massage, or even going to sleep. This should not be an unhealthy coping mechanism such as alcohol or drugs.
  - Step 2** Calling a nominated friend or family member who's involved in supporting the person and has agreed to be a contact on the safety plan.
  - Step 3** Prepare a list of 24/7 helplines to call if they're feeling low.
  - Step 4** Taking the individual to the emergency room or calling 000.
- **Facilitate professional support:** along with the help of another individual who the person trusts, assist the person in getting professional support as soon as possible. This could be from a GP, an EAP service, psychologist, school counsellor or community mental health services. There are usually face-to-face, phone and online options available, and many of them are available 24/7. You might suggest making the call together to book an appointment or even offer to go with them to see their GP. Supporting the person to get professional help is an important step to getting them on track to becoming well again.
- **Ask for a promise:** ask the person to promise that they will reach out and tell someone (one of the people on their safety plan) if suicidal thoughts return. This will make it more likely they will seek help in the future.
- **Stay involved:** thoughts of suicide don't disappear easily so the continued involvement of family and friends is very important to the person's recovery. Check in regularly to see how they are and remember to keep asking directly about thoughts of suicide.
- **Look after yourself:** it's difficult and emotionally draining supporting someone who is suicidal. Make sure you find someone to talk to so that you're supported as well.

## Some common misconceptions about suicide

MISCONCEPTION	REALITY
People who talk about suicide don't do it.	Talking about suicide can be an appeal for help. Most people usually communicate their intentions of suicide to another person, either directly or indirectly.
Once a person decides to suicide, there's nothing anyone can do.	The suicidal crisis can sometimes be a cry for help rather than a wish to die. With help, the person can be encouraged towards life.
Suicide happens without warning, is a spontaneous act and/or people keep their plans to themselves.	Research suggests that most people give warning of their intention to suicide beforehand. More often, this intention is not recognised by others rather than hidden.
Talking openly about suicide increases the risk.	It's important not to avoid asking about suicide. Raising the issue sensitively and asking directly about suicidal thoughts gives the person permission to speak about their distress and shows that you care.
If someone asks me to keep their suicide thoughts/ plans a secret, I must keep that promise.	If there's a chance the person may harm themselves, confidentiality shouldn't be maintained. Instead, encourage the person to make a list of people they would be comfortable getting support from.

## Seek help and support

If you or someone you know is feeling overwhelmed and needs some additional support, there are plenty of support services available, depending on your needs.

### Lifeline

24/7 crisis support and suicide prevention services.

 13 11 14

### Suicide Call Back Service

24/7 counselling service available online, via webchat or phone regarding suicide and who it may affect.

 1300 659 467

 [suicidcallbackservice.org.au](https://suicidcallbackservice.org.au)

### Beyond Blue

Immediate and confidential support through their 24/7 helpline and online chat services with trained mental health professionals.

 1300 22 46 36

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**We hope this guide has helped educate you on recognising signs and how to have a conversation with someone you're concerned about. Mental health is vital to the overall wellbeing of you and your loved ones and there are always more actions and behaviors you can learn to safeguard it, especially during times of uncertainty.**



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR YOUR WELLBEING

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If you'd like to continue your mental health journey, Head to Health is a website provided by the Australian Department of Health that brings together a range of mental wellbeing information, programs and forums available to the wider community.

Visit [headtohealth.gov.au](https://headtohealth.gov.au)

**Important information:** This document is prepared jointly by TAL Services Limited ABN 60 076 105 130 and Ingeus Australia Pty Ltd trading as Assure Programs ABN 87 152 509 370 (Assure). The information contained in this brochure is provided by Assure.

**1** Lifeline Australia, Statistics on Suicide in Australia. <https://www.lifeline.org.au/about-lifeline/lifeline-information/statistics-on-suicide-in-australia>