



LeVa

# After a suicide attempt



/LeVaPasifika



*'Kia hora te marino, kia whakapapa pounamu te moana, kia tere te kārohirohi i mua i tō huarahi –*

*May calm and tranquility be widespread, may the water that you sail in glisten like greenstone, and may their shimmering light guide you safely on your journey.'*

- Rangawhenua, Ngāti Maniapoto



Finding out that someone you know has made a suicide attempt can be a stressful thing to go through. Sometimes people blame themselves for what has happened. The fact that someone you care about has attempted suicide is not your fault. This is the time to take great care of everyone involved.

This resource has been developed to offer support and suggestions during times of uncertainty.

### **Key messages**

- » Try to stay calm
- » Connect with compassion and show that you care
- » Listen with an open heart, free of judgement
- » Look after yourself, you matter

## How can I help?



The first few days after a suicide attempt can be a particularly hard time for family and friends. Common feelings and reactions you may feel include shame, guilt, anger, fear, avoidance, rejection, minimising (downplaying what has happened) and withdrawal (isolating yourself from others).

You may be left wondering whether the person you care about is okay, whether you can trust them, and if they might try to harm themselves again. These are all normal reactions.

It can be difficult knowing what to say or do. There are ways that you can equip yourself so that you are well informed and in the best position to offer support. You do not have to fill the role of counsellor, psychologist or doctor, or feel like you need to be an expert. Remember, you are not alone and there is support out there to help you all get through this.



## What do I do?



### Emotional support

**Demonstrate love and care:** If ever there is a time to show love, compassion, and care, it is when someone you care about is in distress. There are all sorts of things you can do to actively show someone that you care, and that life is worth living, and people do this in their own ways. For example:

- » Showing love in ways that feel natural and normal to us and those we are caring for.
- » Being fully there for them and without judgement – this is one of the most important things we can do. Communicate with compassion, courage and confidence.
- » Putting our pride and ego aside and removing any unrealistic expectations we might have of them.
- » Include them in the conversations about what needs to happen to keep them safe, who needs to be involved, what is said to others and when.
- » Provide safe and private spaces so they can reveal what stressors and pressures they have.

**Avoid minimising feelings:** Do not downplay their feelings or suggest that they “should be grateful” or “have no reason to be sad” or “others have it worse than you”.

**Avoid giving simple solutions:** Refrain from offering quick fixes or clichés like “just think positive.”

**Be patient:** Understand that recovery can be a long process and be patient with their progress.

## Practical support

**Before returning home:** Check your discharge summary or safety plan to see what follow-up process is in place for the person who has made an attempt.

**Encourage professional help:** Gently encourage them to seek professional help so they can create a safety plan for future crises.

**Encourage pleasurable activities:** If they have thoughts of suicide, they have probably stopped doing the things they love. When people are feeling distressed, it is often very hard for them to do things they once loved to do (such as swimming, running, watching movies together). Gently encourage them to reconnect with activities and events they previously enjoyed. It is also important to respect how they are feeling if they cannot do this.

**Help with daily tasks:** Assist with daily responsibilities, such as household chores or other duties/commitments to reduce stress.

**Ensure their physical environment is safe:** When someone is at risk of suicide they may act impulsively. Therefore, making the environment safe and ensuring their physical safety is vital. That means removing things that might be used in another attempt.

- » Taking away pills and medicines, sharp objects, guns, poisons, ropes or cords.
- » Be aware that they are at higher risk when intoxicated, so removing alcohol from the home is recommended. If they are under the influence, do not leave them alone or with a younger person – stay with them or have a trusted adult stay with them.

**Ensure their digital space is safe:** If possible, check what they are posting on social networking sites (such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok or blogs). Many websites give unhelpful information about suicide. You can also direct them to more positive [websites](#) that can provide advice and guidance.

**Strengthen their ties to culture:** Reconnect them with their culture and strengthen their cultural identity. This helps to increase their sense of belonging.

**Help to enhance their problem-solving skills:** Supporting others to enhance their problem-solving and conflict resolution skills in non-harmful ways is important. Check out Aunty Dee, a problem-solving app at [www.auntydee.co.nz](http://www.auntydee.co.nz).



**Encourage healthy habits:** Promote healthy lifestyle habits, such as regular exercise, healthy eating and adequate sleep.

**Provide resources:** Share information about support groups, hotlines and mental health resources.





## When others can step in

- » Identify trusted people in your networks who can help.
- » Think about family members, friends, friends' parents, guidance counsellors, social workers, GPs, youth workers, and teachers; anyone who is a natural helper or is connected to professional services and may have useful insights.
- » Sometimes people may need the support of a mental health professional (counsellor, psychologist, psychiatrist) to help them work through their difficulties and to find helpful ways of coping and living well.
- » In a crisis, it is important to not leave the person alone and to try and keep them in one place until more help has come. If it is not an emergency, text or call 1737 for additional support. If it is an emergency dial 111 immediately.



## Recognise the warning signs

One of the best things we can do is recognise the warning signs for suicide and when someone needs help.

If you're worried your loved one might make another attempt, these are some common warning signs we might see in someone who is suicidal:

- » Sudden changes in mood and behaviour. This might look like suddenly withdrawing from people or being unusually calm or even overly cheerful.
- » Communicating about wanting to die. Talking or posting on social media about suicide or saying "goodbye".
- » Making preparations. This may include getting personal matters in order, tidying up surroundings and/or giving away special possessions.
- » Having a plan around suicide and having access to methods.
- » Engaging in risky behaviours that are out of character. For example, driving fast in cars, bingeing on alcohol or drugs, self-harming.
- » Feeling hopeless or a burden to others.

These are only some of the warning signs you might encounter. To learn more, you can find more information about warning signs from the LifeKeepers suicide prevention training at [www.lifekeepers.nz](http://www.lifekeepers.nz).



## How to care for ourselves

**Seek help from your networks:** Seek help from trusted people, other family members, peers, professionals – there will be trusted, respectful and safe people in your support networks, as well as natural helpers.

Make sure you take care of yourself too. Supporting someone who has attempted suicide is not easy. Make sure you have lots of support in place for yourself. Identify who these support people are, work collaboratively with them and seek professional help.

**Take care of relationships:** Nurturing healthy relationships is vital for wellbeing and provides people with a sense of purpose. Relationships help us during tough times, but relationships can also be a source of stress. Where possible, mend relationships so that they are healthy and a source of comfort, not stress.

Reach out to them by sharing a smile, a hug or just spending time together. Being there and being approachable is one of the most important things we can do.

**Equip yourself with knowledge:** Knowing what to listen for, look out for, feel for, say, and where to seek help can save lives. Actively equip yourself with the right information to be able to assist a person at risk of suicide.

Le Va has educational programmes and resources that can help you with this.



**LifeKeepers national suicide prevention training programme:**

[www.lifekeepers.nz](http://www.lifekeepers.nz)

**Mana Akiaki:** Fostering te ao Māori approaches to suicide prevention training [www.lifekeepers.nz](http://www.lifekeepers.nz)



**FLO Pasifika for Life suicide prevention education:**

[www.leva.co.nz/training-education/flo-talanoa/](http://www.leva.co.nz/training-education/flo-talanoa/)

## Creating a safe space to have more courageous conversations about suicide



**Connect • Ask • Respond • Engage**

### Connect with compassion and Ask with courage

After an attempt, asking someone if they still have thoughts about suicide can be daunting. You may notice warning signs and be too afraid to ask. Talking about suicide in a caring, non-judgemental way can prevent a further attempt. Connecting with compassion and listening without judgement builds a trusting space. This supports us to Ask with courage.

Asking with courage means we need to be calm, confident, direct and real. Avoid getting angry or upset, trying to solve their problems immediately, or trying to cheer them up or distract them. Instead, be compassionate, courageous and listen without judgement.



## Respond with confidence - be prepared for any response

If they respond with yes, your response is to be **B.R.A.V.E.**

**B**e calm and breathe - naturally, if someone was to tell you they were having thoughts of taking their own life your initial reaction would be to panic. Take a breath and remain calm.

**R**eassure them – let them know they did the right thing by telling you. Try saying: “I’m so glad you came to me. I’m here for you. I will be there for you through this. I can handle whatever you have to say. Thanks for trusting me with this.”

**A**llow them to talk – listening means tuning in and really listening to why they want to take their own life. This is their opportunity to tell you how they feel. As hard as it might be for you to hear, let them talk about why they want to die.

**V**alidate their feelings – acknowledge that you understand what they have just shared with you, and you are not there to judge them. Allow them to express their feelings and accept them. Validating includes simply saying “yes” or “okay” and nodding your head as they talk. Say, “I’m here for you. I’m hearing you.”

**E**stablish any risk, ensure their safety and give them hope – let them know there is help and support available to them.

## Listen to understand

It is important to listen carefully to understand what people are saying, and to stop and think before we speak. Many things influence how we deliver and receive information, so context is important. Sometimes when people give us information, the message is not received well or there can be misunderstanding. Remember to avoid getting angry or upset.

Here are some tips to help with connection.

**Show interest:** When there is genuine interest in others, they are likely to feel heard and understood. Turn to face them and remember to nod or use sounds to signal that they are being heard.

**Pay attention:** Brain studies show that people can't properly focus on more than one thing at a time particularly when they are going through a difficult time. To connect and understand, they need our full attention. Put down that phone and turn off the TV. Remove any distractions.

**No judgement:** When people feel judged, they are less likely to openly share. Accept what they say as their own truth and be mindful of responses. What is said can impact on whether a person feels judged or safe. It is important to listen – avoid any judgement or opinion you may have, so that more open and transparent conversations can take place.

**No ego:** Sometimes a sense of pride can get in the way of understanding what others are saying. The focus should be on listening and paying attention to them, no matter how we feel.

**Ask questions:** It can be easy for us all to misunderstand what a person might be saying. Never assume that you know things. This can be avoided by asking questions for clarity and repeating what they say to ensure we understand correctly.

## Think before speaking

Check out these talking tips that can help build meaningful connection.

**Think first:** Be careful not to hurt people without meaning to. It is helpful to think and consider how words can have such a big impact on others. Pause and take a moment to think about what to say.

**Choose the right time and place:** Choose a place that is comfortable and safe to talk. Make sure there are no distractions around and choose a good time when everyone is free.

**Be open and honest:** Enter the discussion with an open mind. People respond better when they don't feel attacked or judged. Be reasonable and understand that we don't always share the same views and opinions as others, and that is okay.

**Check in:** We can check their wellbeing by asking them to share their thinking, asking questions or giving comments about how they are doing. During any conversation, take pauses and make sure they have the space and time to share their inner thoughts and feelings.







## Challenging conversations

Part of communicating is knowing how to handle difficult subjects. It's not always easy trying to maintain good communication skills when faced with unknown experiences or when emotions start to take over. It may take practice, but it is possible. Check out some helpful pointers below.

### Don't let emotions be in control

Stop, breathe and think before reacting.

Allow time to sit with an emotion and choose words carefully before giving a response.

Decide whether it is the right time to have a conversation, or whether it is better to wait for a better time.



## Own these feelings by using 'I' statements

Try these steps to get any messages across without attacking the other person:

*I feel...* so sad

*when...* you do not tell me what is really happening with you

*because...* I care about you and want to know how I can help you.

*What I need is...* for you to please trust me so we can work through this together.

### Avoid the following phrases, as they can make the situation worse

*You make me...* embarrassed.

*You never...* listen.

*You did this...* to yourself.

### Dislike the behaviour or the situation, never the person

- » Do not make any personal judgement statements.
- » Approach the situation with compassion and empathy.
- » Do not blame the person for what has happened.

Resolving the issue immediately may not be possible so, where you can, try to involve a support person who can help process what the next step could be to keep everyone safe, for example a trusted relative, a good friend or someone you both trust.

## Helplines

Emergency: **111**

Need to Talk: text or call **1737**

Depression Helpline: **0800 111 757**

Healthline: **0800 611 116**

Youthline: **0800 376 633**

Age Concern NZ: **04 801 9338**

Samaritans: **0800 726 666**

What's Up: **0800 942 8787**

OUTLine NZ: **0800 688 5463** (0800 OUTLINE)

Lifeline: **0800 543 35**

Crisis teams support info:

<https://info.health.nz/mental-health-services/crisis-assessment-teams/>





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*Igniting communities, creating change*



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