

PERSONAL SAFETY PLAN: A supporter's guide



This guide will help you to support someone with their personal safety plan.

If someone you care about is going through a tough or challenging time, or having suicidal thoughts or feelings, there are many ways you can support them.

You could help them write their safety plan, provide practical support, give encouragement or simply be there for them when they need you.



Remember: Your support and care can make a big difference. But being there for someone you care about during tough times can be hard on you too. Make sure you look after your own wellbeing and have your own support person you can turn to.

What is a personal safety plan?

A personal safety plan allows someone to keep a record of the things they can do and the people they can contact if they are feeling overwhelmed or experiencing tough or challenging times.

Ideally, a personal safety plan should be completed when the person is feeling calm, and with someone to help them. This may be a trusted whānau member, friend, counsellor, or health professional.

A personal safety plan covers the following areas:

- 1. Recognising what's happening (warning signs):** Naming feelings, thoughts or behaviours that can lead to risky behaviours.
- 2. My reasons to live:** Listing what makes the person feel good or things that are important to them.
- 3. Keeping safe:** Advice for making the person's environment safer or knowing when to leave an unsafe situation.
- 4. What can I do by myself?:** Things the person can do to distract themselves from unsafe thoughts (without contacting someone else).
- 5. Who can I connect with?:** Listing the people they can be with to help lift their mood, and the places where they feel safe.
- 6. My supporters:** Naming and listing contact details of supportive whānau, friends or health professionals who can offer help to the person during tough times.

The plan also includes helplines and other sources of support that your friend or whānau member can contact for assistance.

Ways to help as a trusted supporter

Help them create their plan

If possible, encourage your friend or whānau member to work through their safety plan with a counsellor or health professional.

As someone they trust, you can also help by offering ideas if they're struggling with what to include in their plan.

If they're finding it difficult to know what to include, try not to push too hard. Instead, take a break and try again when they're feeling calmer.

Let them share their plan with you

If you know they've completed a personal plan, ask if they'd like to share it with you. You can talk through the different sections, see the ways you can support them or ask what support they need from you.

Encourage them to use their plan

If you notice changes in your loved one's behaviour or warning signs they've identified in their safety plan, encourage them to use their plan.

Being there

As their support person, you can help in many ways, including:

- Spending quality time together – going for a walk, watching a TV show together, etc.
- Listening and acknowledging how they are feeling if they share thoughts or feelings with you.
- Encouraging them to reach out to helplines or support services.
- Offering to call a helpline or support service with them.
- Supporting them to see a health professional. Offer to make the appointment, and go with them if you can.
- Just being there – offering support, understanding and kindness.
- Letting them know you value them.

If you're asked to be someone's support person, but the timing is not right for you, or you are not in the right space yourself, it's OK to say no.

It's best to be upfront and let the person know so they can seek support from someone else.



Talking about suicidal thoughts

If you are worried that someone might be thinking about suicide, don't be afraid to ask them directly.

You might be fearful that having a conversation about suicide may plant the idea in someone's head, but this won't happen.

Although it can feel hard to hear when someone shares their thoughts about suicide with you, it's important to have safe, open, honest and compassionate conversations so they feel heard, supported and understood.

Show compassion by:

- Listening carefully, without judgment. Try repeating key things back to the person to be sure you've understood how they are feeling.
- Not making assumptions. You might think you know how they are feeling about a situation but let them tell you in their own words. Prompt them by asking "what are your thoughts about this?"
- Being mindful of your body language. Give them your full attention.
- Let them know there is help available to them. Encourage or support them to get help and talk to someone about what they are going through.

It's OK not to use the word 'suicide' if you don't want to. You can use different terms, such as 'wanting to end their life' or talking about someone feeling 'deep sadness'.

It can be helpful to mirror the words that the person you are supporting uses.

If there are some things you're not comfortable talking about, let them know so they can include other supporters in their plan.

For more information, visit the '[Supporting Others](#)' section on our website. You can also order for free or download the booklet [Are you worried someone is thinking of suicide?](#) or see our range of suicide prevention resources at mentalhealth.org.nz/download.

Remind the person you are supporting that:

- Thoughts about killing themselves are just thoughts.
- They don't have to act on them, no matter how overwhelming they are or how often they have them.
- They won't always have these thoughts.
- These thoughts are not who they are.

Self-care

Supporting someone when they're having suicidal thoughts can be hard. It's important to take care of yourself when you are caring for others.

The person you're supporting could recover quite soon, but they may feel the way they do for weeks, months or even years.

Looking after yourself is essential to be able to walk alongside them.

Being in this situation can be very difficult, and you can't do everything. It's normal to feel scared, powerless or unsure of how to help.

Remember to take care of yourself when you are caring for others. Make sure you're:

- Getting enough sleep, eating properly and exercising.
- Being kind to yourself and taking time out when you need to.
- Asking for help if you need it. Remember, you don't have to do this on your own.
- Connecting with or building up your support system. This might involve talking to whānau, a spiritual leader, a counsellor, or trusted friends.

Remember, you can free call or text 1737 to chat with a trained counsellor at any time. They're there for you, too.

If you are worried about someone

If you are worried that someone is suicidal, ask them. It could save their life.

- Take it seriously if someone shares that they are having suicidal thoughts and what they are planning.
- Listen and don't judge. Take them seriously and let them know you care.
- Support them to access professional help, like a doctor or counsellor, as soon as possible. Offer to help them make an appointment and go with them if you can.
- Help them to find and access the support they need from people they trust: friends, whānau, kaumātua, religious, community or cultural leaders, or health professionals.
- If they don't get the help they need the first time, keep trying. Ask them if they would like your help explaining what they need to a professional.
- For more information visit the [Worried about someone?](#) page on our website.

In a crisis or emergency

If someone has attempted suicide, they reveal a specific plan to end their life, or you're worried about their immediate safety, do the following:

- Call 111, if they are an immediate physical danger to themselves or others.
- Contact your local [mental health crisis assessment team](#).
- Go to the emergency department (ED) at your nearest hospital.
- Don't leave them alone – make sure someone stays with them until they get help.
- Remove any obvious means of suicide they might use (e.g rope, pills, guns, car keys, knives).
- Try to stay calm and let them know you care.
- Keep them talking. Listen and ask questions without judging.
- Make sure you are safe.



Help and further information

The following services offer free support 24/7 and can connect you with others who can help you or the person you are supporting:

- **1737 - Need to talk?** Free call or text 1737 anytime to talk to a trained counsellor
- **Lifeline** – 0800 543 354 or free text 4357 (HELP)
- **Youthline** – 0800 376 633 or free text 234
- **Samaritans** – 0800 726 666

Other websites and free helplines that offer guidance and support include:

- **Anxiety NZ** Call 0800 ANXIETY (269 4389) for specific questions around your or your loved ones' anxious feelings.
- **Depression.org.nz** Call 0800 111 757 or text 4202 (to talk to a trained counsellor).
- **What's Up** - Call 0800 942 8787 (for 5–18 year olds). Phone counselling is available every day from 11am–11pm. Online chat is available from 11am–10.30pm.
- **Yellow Brick Road** – For whānau support visit yellowbrickroad.org.nz
- **Asian Family Services** – Call 0800 862 342 (Mon–Fri 9am–8pm).
- **Vaka Tautua** – A free national Pacific helpline. Call 0800 Ola lelei/0800 652 535 (Mon–Fri 8.30am–5pm).
- Contact your GP or your local healthcare provider.
- To access a personal safety plan visit www.mentalhealth.org.nz/safety-plan

For more resources or information visit:
www.mentalhealth.org.nz