

Suicide Safety Plan

West Hatch High School

Suicide Safety Plan

A suicide safety plan is a written set of instructions that you create for yourself as a contingency plan should you begin to experience thoughts about harming yourself. It will contain a series of gradually escalating steps that you will follow, proceeding from one step to the next, until you are safe.

If you have depression, whether it has been diagnosed by a healthcare provider or not, there is a very real risk that at some point in the course of the illness you may experience thoughts of suicide. While the emotional pain that has triggered these thoughts may feel overwhelming, **it does not mean that you will lose control or act on your thoughts.**

In fact, having a suicide safety plan in place is one method you can use to cope with your bad feelings until circumstances change.

Creating a Suicide Safety Plan

You should work together with someone you trust—such as your best friend, a close family member or counsellor to develop your suicide safety plan. It is a good idea to get these people involved since you will most likely need to call on them if you decide to carry out your plan.

It is a good idea to create the plan while you are feeling well and can think clearly, rather than waiting until you are feeling suicidal. Put your suicide safety plan in writing and keep it in a place where you can easily find it.

Information to Include

Your suicide safety plan should include several steps and be written in the order presented below. An example of each step is provided to help you think about what that step means for you.

When to Use the Plan

The first step in creating your suicide safety plan is to familiarize yourself with the types of situations, images, thoughts, feelings, and behaviours that might start just before or at the same time you experience suicidal urges.

List these warning signs so that you can refer back to them when deciding whether to activate your plan. It's also helpful to familiarise yourself with some of the risk factors for suicide in order to recognise these warning signs if present.

For example: a warning sign could be that you tend to isolate yourself and not take good care of yourself when you get depressed.

How to Calm Yourself

Create a list of activities that can be soothing to you when you're upset. If you can't think of any examples off-hand, you may wish to brainstorm and try some mindfulness methods that have helped others such as breathing exercises (See West Hatch Anxiety Busting Guide) or body scan meditation (See attachment 1). Or take a look at different ways to reduce stress (See attachment 2) to see if any methods might be helpful for you.

A few self-calming ideas to consider: taking a hot bath, listening to music, or exercising.

List Reasons for Living

Create a list of your reasons for living. When you are feeling suicidal, it is very easy to get caught up in the pain you are feeling and forget the positives in your life. Your list will help you focus your attention on the reasons to keep going until your suicidal thoughts and feelings subside.

Some people with or without depression find that keeping a gratitude journal is helpful. If you find yourself feeling suicidal, looking at what you have written may help you focus on the positives in your life until the feelings pass.

Consider writing about blessings like your family, friends, dog, health, or faith.

Gratitude Journal

This is a journal or diary where you list a number of things that you are grateful for every day. Let's say 8 things, this may be a good number to aim for but remember 8 is only a guide it can be more.

Trusted Contact Information

Keep a list of contacts you can talk to if you are unable to distract yourself with self-help measures. List names, phone numbers, or other contact information, and be sure to have backups in case your first or second choices are unavailable.

Your list of trusted contacts may include your friends, relatives, or your religious leader.

See also West Hatch High School Suicide “Helping identify someone who feels suicidal” booklet for helplines and support apps.

Professional Assistance Resources

Create a list of all professional resources available to you, along with their phone numbers, email addresses, and other pertinent contact information.

Members of your professional health care team may include your psychiatrist and your therapist as well as a helpline.

If you haven't yet seen a mental health professional, take a moment to learn about the different types of therapists who care for people with depression, and make an appointment today.

You can find out more about the types of therapy used on this NHS website:

<https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/talking-therapies-medicine-treatments/talking-therapies-and-counselling/types-of-talking-therapies/>

Make Your Environment Safe

Plan what steps you can take to make yourself safe. This may involve removing or securing any items that you are likely to use to hurt yourself, or going to another location until the impulses have passed. It may also mean getting another person involved to help you.

If you feel like hurting yourself, you might plan to go to a public place like a shopping centre, restaurant, or library to distract yourself.

When a Suicide Safety Plan Isn't Enough

If all other steps have failed to keep you feeling safe, go to your nearest hospital A and E and ask for assistance.

Keep the name, address, and directions to the hospital listed in your plan for easy access or save it on your phone.

Also keep the name and number of your local taxi firm recorded on your plan or a taxi cab app up to date on your mobile phone.

If you do not feel that you can get to the hospital safely on your own, call 999 and ask for an ambulance.

What to Do If a Friend Is Suicidal

Many people with depression have friends who are coping with similar challenges. This could be a friend from school, or a friend from home or family member you have known for a long time. After all, depression is common.

After you have completed your own safety plan, encourage others who are coping with depression to create a plan for themselves.

How to Use a Suicide Safety Plan

If you begin to experience any of the warning signs of suicide listed in your suicide safety plan, proceed through the steps you have previously outlined for yourself, one by one, until you are feeling safe again.

However, if you are feeling out of control and are strongly thinking of suicide call either a trusted friend who can be with you immediately or 999.

While you will likely have your suicide safety plan in your home, don't forget you can now load your plan to your mobile phone and take it anywhere.

Attachment 1

How to Practice Body Scan Meditation

The body scan can be performed while lying down, sitting, or in other postures. The steps below are a guided meditation designed to be done while sitting.

For those new to the body scan, we recommend performing this practice with the audio:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CyKhfUdOEgs>

However, you can also use the script below for guidance for yourself or for leading this practice for others.

Begin by bringing your attention into your body.

You can close your eyes if that's comfortable for you.

You can notice your body seated wherever you're seated, feeling the weight of your body on the chair, on the floor.

Take a few deep breaths.

And as you take a deep breath, bring in more oxygen enlivening the body. And as you exhale, have a sense of relaxing more deeply.

You can notice your feet on the floor, notice the sensations of your feet touching the floor. The weight and pressure, vibration, heat.

You can notice your legs against the chair, pressure, pulsing, heaviness, lightness.

Notice your back against the chair.

Bring your attention into your stomach area. If your stomach is tense or tight, let it soften. Take a breath.

Notice your hands. Are your hands tense or tight? See if you can allow them to soften.

Notice your arms. Feel any sensation in your arms. Let your shoulders be soft.

Notice your neck and throat. Let them be soft. Relax.

Soften your jaw. Let your face and facial muscles be soft.

Then notice your whole body present. Take one more breath.

Be aware of your whole body as best you can. Take a breath. And then when you're ready, you can open your eyes.

5 ways to reduce stress right now

A young woman sits in front of her computer, eyes closed, fingers squeezing the bridge of her nose.

A little bit of stress can be useful, but ongoing stress can affect your mental and physical wellbeing.

Feeling stressed? Take ten minutes to try one of the below activities and decrease your stress levels.

Attachment 2

Ways to reduce stress

1. Exercise

It's a cliché for a reason: exercise really does prompt your body to release feel-good hormones like endorphins, which can help you to feel less stressed. Stress can also make you subconsciously tense your muscles, which exercise might help to release.

It doesn't have to be a full workout: walk around the block, do 20 jumping jacks, go for a quick run or find a 10 minute yoga flow on YouTube to follow.

2. Organise

Stress can kick in when you're feeling overwhelmed by the number of tasks that need to be done or deadlines that must be met. Writing a to-do list or time management strategy can help you focus on seeing each task through to completion.

Sit down and write out everything you need to get done and each step you'll need to take to complete each task. Prioritise what must be done first and identify what can be left to a later time or what you might be able to assign to someone else. Be realistic about how much time it will take you to complete each task and build space into your schedule to reward yourself for getting the job done.

Writing everything down can help make stressful tasks seem more manageable.

3. Breathe

Stress and anxiety can affect how you breathe, which has flow-on effects on how your body and mind feels. Taking a few deep breaths can help slow your breathing and heart rate, relax your muscles and calm your mind.

4. Take a time out

Stress can affect our emotions and how we behave, as well as our physical and mental health. Stress might make you become irritable or short tempered, easily upset or agitated.

When you start noticing that stress is affecting how you feel or behave, it might be time to step away and spend a few minutes just focusing on yourself. Do something you enjoy like reading a book or listening to music, or find a trusted friend or colleague that you can talk to about how you're feeling.

Time outs don't have to just be reactive: proactively build some 'you time' into your schedule each week, allowing yourself to do something enjoyable whilst looking after your health.

Taking a break can help refresh your mind as well as your energy levels.

5. Meditate

If you haven't tried mindfulness, meditation or relaxation exercises yet, there's no better time to start. Scientifically proven to help decrease and manage stress, and promote mental wellbeing, these tools are useful for when you're experiencing stress and as prevention tools in times when you're feeling well.

Why you should decrease stress

While a little bit of stress is normal and can actually help you function more effectively during times of pressure, ongoing stress is not good for your physical or mental health. From causing headaches and sleep loss to affecting hormonal function, blood pressure and relationships, there are many reasons why experts are warning of the ill-effects the current 'epidemic of stress' is having on public health.

When you should get help

Ongoing stress affects your mental health and can be worth a trip to the doctor. You should see your GP if you've been feeling unwell or 'not yourself' for two weeks or more.

Remember: you don't need to wait for a crisis situation to seek help for mental health.