

After an Attempt



**A Guide for
Taking Care of Yourself
After Your Suicide Attempt**



Waterloo Region
Suicide Prevention Council
www.wrspc.ca

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Acknowledgements

This booklet was originally developed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: After an Attempt. A Guide for Taking Care of Your Family Member After Treatment in the Emergency Department.* CMHS-SVP-0159, Rockville, MD: Center for Mental Health Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2006.

This booklet has been updated by the Waterloo Region Suicide Prevention Council in collaboration with the Grand River Hospital's Mental Health and Addictions Program in 2013.

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Recovering From a

Suicide Attempt

This booklet was created to help as you begin to work through the challenges that led you to attempt to take your life. It offers information about moving ahead after your treatment in the emergency department and provides resources for more information about suicide and mental illnesses.

Today

Today may feel like the hardest day of your life. You have seriously thought about or perhaps attempted to end your life. You may be exhausted. A common experience after surviving a suicide attempt is extreme fatigue. You may be angry. You may be embarrassed or ashamed. The attempt itself, the reactions of other people, transportation to and treatment in an emergency department or other health care facility. All these can be overwhelming to you right now. But, recovery is likely, and all the feelings you are experiencing right now can get better.

After the Emergency Department

After you have been treated for a suicide attempt in an emergency department and the doctors believe you are medically stabilized, you will either be discharged (released) or you will be hospitalized. If you are discharged after your suicide attempt, the staff in the emergency department should provide you with a plan for follow-up care.

Your Plan

The exact steps for followup care will vary with each person, but your plan should include:

A scheduled appointment in the near future with a mental health provider (such as a psychiatrist or other licensed therapist). Make sure that the name and contact information for the provider is given to you before you leave the hospital and that your appointment will occur as soon as possible.

Information on any treatments that you received in the emergency department, such as medications, and what, if anything, you will need to do about those treatments after you leave.

Referrals to local and national resources and crisis lines for information and support. See the back pages of this brochure for more information.

Once you have a plan for followup care that you understand and are comfortable with, you and, if appropriate, a family member should work closely with a therapist to ensure that your plan is meaningful and effective.

If the emergency department staff feel that you need more immediate care or longer term care than the emergency department can provide, you will be referred for inpatient hospitalization. If hospitalization is necessary, you and your family, if appropriate, can begin to work with the hospital to develop a plan for the next steps in your care. Hospital staff (usually a social worker) should help you with this process.

Next Steps

What if You Don't Want To Go to the Hospital?

People generally have the right to consent to or refuse treatment. However, if the emergency physician believes you are a danger to yourself or someone else, he or she must consider having you hospitalized involuntarily for a limited period of time. The Mental Health Act is decided by the Ontario legislature and gives doctors and psychiatric facilities certain powers such as involuntary admission if they feel that you are a danger to yourself or others. If you have questions about your rights as a patient, you should contact your local Protection and Advocacy organization. The PPAO (Psychiatric Patient Advocate Office) provides advocacy to inpatients at 10 major hospitals and vertical health facilities in Ontario. You can contact them at 1.800.578.2343 or online at: www.sse.gov.on.ca/mohltc/ppao/en/default.aspx These are legal centres that are funded to protect the rights of persons with mental health needs.

If you disagree with being committed, you can contact and apply to the Consent and Capacity Board at 1.866.777.7391 or online www.CCBoard.on.ca

Next Steps: Moving Ahead / Coping With Future Thoughts of Suicide

Recovery from the negative thoughts and feelings that made you want to end your life is possible. You may get to a place where you never have thoughts of suicide again and you can lead a happy, satisfying life.

A Plan + Support

You also may learn to live with these thoughts in a way that keeps you safe. After you leave the hospital there are several things you can do to help in your recovery. It may feel hard and overwhelming right now, but over the next few days, following these tips can help turn things around.

Create a Safety Plan

You and your doctor or other licensed therapist, should work together to develop a safety plan to help reduce the risk of a future suicide attempt. When creating a safety plan, be honest with yourself and your doctor to ensure that the plan meets your needs and that you feel comfortable with it. Although everyone's safety plan is different, some common things that may be in your plan include: signs that may indicate a return of suicidal thoughts or feelings and what to do about them; when to seek additional treatment; and contact information for your doctor, therapist, or a trusted friend or family member. Keep a written copy of your safety plan nearby so you can refer to it as needed.

Build a Support System

A support system is a key part of recovering from a suicide attempt and preventing another one. It is important that you have at least one person in your life who can be your "ally." This must be a person you trust and can be honest with - especially if you start to have thoughts of ending your life again. Family members or a close friend can serve this important purpose. A member of

People Do Care

the clergy, mentor, or colleague also could be helpful to you at this time. Having more than one ally can be a great asset, as well.

Group therapy helps you share your experiences with people who have been in a similar situation as yourself.

Keeping your ally informed about your thoughts, feelings, and wishes can help in your recovery and may help prevent another suicide attempt. You will have to be honest with yourself and with your ally to make this work. Even when you are feeling alone, always remember that there are people in your life who care about you a great deal and are willing to help.

Learn to Live Again

When you are recovering, the world can look like a pretty bleak place. It may take a little while before your life starts to feel comfortable again. One thing you can do to help is to get back into a routine. Eat at regular times, exercise regularly, and go to sleep and get up at the same time each day. Try to join in your usual activities a little at a time, and add in more when you feel comfortable.

There is a great walking program offered through Waterloo Regional Homes for Mental Health. Call them at 519.742.3191

"Since the time I was in the ER, I have experienced thoughts of suicide, but luckily I have a strong support system in place."

Quote from a national survey of individuals who attempted suicide.

There is Help

If you continue to have thoughts of suicide, reach out for help immediately and contact your ally, a doctor, or a crisis hotline (see page 10 of this booklet for some listings).

Remember: The emergency department is open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year to help you if you have thoughts of suicide or if your medical team is unavailable to provide you with the needed care.

Listen closely, and carefully consider the support and advice you receive. It is important to be honest with yourself, your doctor, or others about your feelings so that you get the best possible care.

Sometimes being under pressure and having thoughts of suicide can make it difficult for you to make the best decisions, and at those times, other people may have a more realistic view of your situation than you do. Your ally can help you work through these confusing and isolating thoughts and feelings and help keep you safe.

Everyone's Recovery is Different

Some people have persistent thoughts of suicide. For others, such thoughts may accompany certain moods or circumstances. Here are some steps you can take to prevent negative and destructive thoughts in the future and to keep you safe. You also may want to consider adding some of these steps to your safety plan.

Be Safe

Remove the Means for Hurting Yourself from Your Environment

Work with your ally to remove methods of self-harm. It is better not to have these things around while you are recovering. If you use medication, keep only a few days' supply on hand and ask someone else to hold onto the rest. For other means of self-harm, place them in someone else's hands for a while; you can always take back these items when things feel more settled.

Identify What Sets Off or Starts These Thoughts for You

It may be an anniversary of a painful event, for instance, or seeing a knife in the kitchen. Plan to minimize the effect of these triggers on your life. Sometimes you can avoid them or train yourself to respond differently, or you can involve your allies ahead of time to help you face a difficult situation. Remember that life events do not cause a suicide, but they can increase the risk of an attempt.

Learn About Mental Illness

Someone who has had or is living with suicidal thoughts may be suffering from a mental illness such as bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, or major depression. Contact a doctor or see page 10 of this brochure for more information about mental illness and treatment.

Be Active

Learn About Crisis Hotlines

Hotlines provide you with a trained person to talk to when you are having suicidal thoughts.

This person will listen to you and help you choose another path. The person you talk with may work with you on your safety plan, so have that plan close by when you make the call. If you do not have a safety plan in place, the crisis staff will help you create one. Crisis lines are included.

Participate in a Mutual Peer-Support Group

There are many types of support groups, and you may wish to participate in one in your area. Learning from others and sharing your experience can make a big difference in the way you think about your life. It also may help save the life of someone else. Canadian Mental Health Association and the Self Help Alliance are good places to start.

Get Involved in Life

Finding a hobby or enjoying a favourite pastime such as listening to music, watching your favourite movie, or collecting things, is a great way to help you cope when things get tough. Hobbies or activities that involve interacting with others are an especially good idea. Whatever your interests may be, make sure you have access to the things you enjoy. That way, if your negative thoughts come back, you can turn to something that brings you comfort and enjoyment.

Community + Faith

Spirituality

Faith can become a very important part of recovery. Explore different churches or groups and be connected to a wide range of people.

Community Centres

Being involved with others and networking with positive people will show you there is a better life out there. Local Community Centres offer lots of programs in an easy non threatening environment. Craft and social activities and more.

Volunteering, Giving Back, Your Generosity

Giving of your time and talents for just a few hours a week can be essential to your mental health and help in your recovery. What are your skills? What makes you feel good? You can meet new people, build skills and have new experiences.

It's important to build up all your sources of strength. Mental Health, Family Support, whatever family means to you, Positive Friends, Mentors, Healthy Activities, Generosity, Spirituality, Medical Access and more.

Resources

Remember - there are always reasons to live and make things better. You can survive, and even thrive, despite the way you feel at times. Recovery is likely.

Helpful resources when you need to talk to someone:

1. Crisis Services 519.744.1813

24/7 prevention, assessment, intervention and resolution for urgent crisis within Waterloo Region

2. Distress Line 519.745.1166

24/7 supportive listening

3. www.YourLifeCounts.org

24/7 online counselling

Sample Safety Plan

This is your safety plan that you fill out now for when you are having thoughts of hurting yourself. If you are now having those thoughts, start at Step 1. Go through each step until you are safe. Remember that suicidal thoughts can be very strong. It may seem they will last forever, but with support and time, these thoughts will usually pass. When they pass, you can put your energy into sorting out problems that have contributed to you feeling badly. The hopelessness you may feel now will not last forever. It is important to reach out for help and support. You can get through this difficult time. Since it can be hard to focus and think clearly when you feel suicidal, put a copy of this in a place where you can easily find it and use it.

1. Do the following activities to calm and comfort myself:

2. Remind myself of my reasons for living:

3. Call a friend or family member:

Name: _____ Phone: _____

4. Call backup person if person above is not available:

Name: _____ Phone: _____

5. Call a care provider (psychologist, psychiatrist, therapist, mental health worker, social worker, spiritual care provider, Elder)

Name: _____ Phone: _____

6. Call my local crisis line:

Phone: _____

7. Go somewhere where I feel safe:

8. Go to the Emergency Room at the nearest hospital or the Crisis Response Centre

Address: _____

9. If I don't feel that I can get to the hospital safely, call 911 and ask for transportation to the hospital. They will send someone to transport me safely.

Provided by Dr. Joti Samra, R. Psych. and Dr. Dan Bilsker, R. Psych. (lead Authors: 20070, Consortium for Organizational Mental Health (COMH; www.comh.ca), Faculty of Health Sciences, Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, B.C.

This document is not intended to replace professional care with a therapist or physician.

Notes

My Safety Plan

Tear out the perforated My Safety Plan card from the back cover of this booklet.

Fill in all the information.

Fold the Plan card down to fit in your pocket, purse or wallet.

Carry it with you at all times.

... My Safety Plan ...

HOW I KNOW I AM IN CRISIS

(triggers . warning signs)

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

I CALM AND COMFORT MYSELF WITH THE FOLLOWING ACTIVITIES

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

MY REASONS FOR LIVING

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

PHONE NUMBERS OF PEOPLE I CAN CALL

1. _____

name

phone

2. _____

name

phone

3. _____

name

phone

The place I go to feel safe

my signature date

My Safety Plan

Crisis Line
Waterloo Region
519.744.1813

IDENTIFICATION

Name: _____

last

first

nickname

Health Card#: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

Postal Code: _____

Phone: _____

Date of Birth: _____

month / day / year

EMERGENCY CONTACTS

Name: _____

last

first

relationship

Phone: _____

home

work

Worker Name (if applicable)

Phone: _____

Agency: _____

MEDICAL

Doctor: _____

name

phone

Call pharmacy for up-to-date medication.

Pharmacy: _____

name

phone



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