

After an Attempt

A Guide for Taking Care of Yourself After a Suicide Attempt



WATERLOO REGION
Suicide Prevention Council

Disclaimers

This guide is intended for general understanding and education only. This handbook is not a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis and/or treatment. Always seek the advice of a physician, psychiatrist, psychologist, nurse or other qualified health care provider before you undergo any treatment or seek answers to any questions you might have. This handbook is not, and is not intended to be used as, a substitute for legal advice. Always seek the advice of a lawyer before pursuing legal action of any kind.

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Help is Available.

Suicide Crisis Helpline (24/7)
Call or text 9-8-8

Talk Suicide Canada:
Call 1-833-456-4566 (24/7) or
Text 45645 (4pm to midnight).

Hope for Wellness Indigenous Helpline (24/7):
Call 1-855-242-3310
Live chat: www.hopeforwellness.ca

Boots on the Ground Peer Support for First Responders:
1-833-677-2668

More resources are available at www.wrspc.ca

Acknowledgements

Acknowledgments

This brochure was originally developed by the National Alliance on Mental Illness in partnership with the Suicide Prevention Resource Center in the United States:
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. *After an Attempt: A Guide for Taking Care of Yourself after Your Treatment in the Emergency Department*. HHS Publication No. SMA18-4355ENG. Rockville, MD: Center for Mental Health Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Revised 2018.

It has been updated by the Waterloo Region Suicide Prevention Council in 2023. Thank you to the Resource and Brochure Review volunteer team, as well as our external reviewers for their work and support updating this brochure.

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Recovering from a Suicide Attempt

This booklet was created to help you begin to work through the challenges that led you to attempt to take your life. We want you to know that this was and perhaps still is a vulnerable time. You may have worked with the emergency department of the hospital, or you may have had other supports outside of a hospital setting that you drew upon after your attempt. This booklet is for you to use, and provides information and resources about suicide and recovery.

Today

Today may feel like the hardest day of your life. You have seriously thought about or perhaps attempted to end your life. There could be any number of emotions you are experiencing right now, such as exhaustion, anger, embarrassment or shame. As you look back, there was a sequence of events that may be difficult to consider right now. These include the attempt itself, the reactions of other people, those who were involved, and your own feelings around all of this. You might have been transported to an emergency department, or another health care facility, or a professional may have intervened. The feelings that come with recalling what happened can be overwhelming. However, recovery is indeed possible and as you work through these feelings, we hope you will emerge with understanding, insight, and compassion for yourself.

After the Emergency Department

If you were treated in an emergency department following the suicide attempt, a few things may have happened. You might have been admitted and assigned a bed. You might have had a medical intervention if your body was hurt. You also may have been released or discharged from the hospital. 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 Discharge Plan

The exact steps for follow-up 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, psychologist or licensed therapist). You should receive the name and contact information for the provider.
- 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.

It's important that your plan for follow-up care is one that you understand and are comfortable with. As part of your follow-up care, it can be important for you to work closely with a mental health provider who is supportive to you. If appropriate and comfortable, you may also find it useful to have a family member or other close friend go with you for follow-up. Working with a mental health service provider and close people in your life can help to ensure that your plan is meaningful to you and effective for your safety.

Sometimes, you can be discharged right from the emergency department with a plan for follow-up care. Other times, there may be concern for your health and safety. If the staff at the emergency department believe that a plan for outpatient care won't keep you safe, then you will be considered for inpatient hospitalization. If this happens, you and your family and close

others (only as appropriate) can begin to work with the hospital to develop a plan for your care. Hospital staff who will help you could involve social workers, nurses, child and youth care workers, and psychiatrists.

What if You Don't Want to Stay in 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, they must consider having you hospitalized involuntarily for a limited period of time.

The Mental Health Act was passed by the Ontario legislature and gives doctors and psychiatric facilities certain powers such as involuntary admission if they believe that you are a danger to yourself or others. If you have questions about your rights as a patient, you can contact your local Protection and Advocacy organization. The PPAO (Psychiatric Patient Advocate Office) provides advocacy to inpatients at 9 major hospitals and vertical health facilities in Ontario. You can contact them at 1.800.578.2343 or online at: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/psychiatric-patient-advocate-office>

If you disagree with being admitted involuntarily, 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 with Recovery

Recovery and healing are possible. Through your recovery journey, you may never have thoughts of suicide again. Or you can learn to navigate suicidal thoughts that occur in a way that allows you to be safe and decreases your distress. Either way, it is possible to lead a meaningful and satisfying life. It may feel hard and overwhelming right now, but incorporating the following suggestions over the next few days or weeks may help.

Create a Safety Plan

You and your doctor or 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 support team 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 are signs that may indicate a return of suicidal thoughts or feelings and what to do about them; when to seek additional help or treatment; contact information for your doctor, therapist, or a trusted friend or family member; as well as reasons to live. It is helpful to keep a written copy of your safety plan nearby so you can refer to it as needed; these visual reminders can help you to take things one step at a time.

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 suicide again. This person could be a family member, close friend, or a community or faith leader, for example. Having more than one ally can be a great asset, as well. It is important to keep your ally informed about your thoughts and feelings so that they can hear how things are for you and help you in your recovery by reminding you of your steps to keep you safe. Honesty in this closeness means you will be vulnerable, and your ally should be someone who can care for you. Recovery can be lonely, but you are not alone. Your ally is there to



remind you that there are people in your life who care about you a great deal and are willing to help.

Re-Engaging with Life

Recovery has different meanings for different people. You could experience the world differently as you go through your recovery. Certainly, it takes a little while before your life starts to feel comfortable again. So, being patient with yourself is important. One thing you can do to help re-engage with life is to get back into a routine. It can be helpful to eat at regular times, exercise regularly, and go to sleep and wake 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.

If you continue to have thoughts of suicide, reach out for help immediately and contact your ally, a doctor, or a crisis hotline.

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 or objective 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: Additional Tips for Recovery

Everyone's recovery journey after a suicide attempt is different. Some people have persistent thoughts of suicide. For others, such thoughts may accompany certain moods or circumstances. There are things you can do to help prevent or manage thoughts of suicide. Take note of the following suggestions and consider incorporating them into your safety plan. It is also important for you to practice these strategies and skills over and over again. With patience, gentleness, consistency, and support, you can practice being safe.

Remove the Means for Hurting Yourself from Your Environment

You can work with your ally to remove methods of self-harm. For some people, it can be helpful not to have these things around while they are recovering. If you use medication, consider options to keep yourself safe such as reducing the supply you have on hand, or asking an ally to help manage medications.

Identify What Triggers These Thoughts for You

Many different things can trigger strong emotions and thoughts of suicide. It may be an anniversary of a painful event, for example. Planning to minimize the effect of these triggers on your life can be important. You can learn strategies that allow you to respond differently when triggered, to set boundaries around triggering people/situations, or you can involve your allies to help support you. Sometimes, just being aware of these triggers or memories, is a way to work with them in ways that eases that impact on you.

Learn About Crisis Hotlines

Crisis hotlines are services you can access when you are struggling. Hotlines provide you with a trained person to talk to when you are struggling with your mental health or having suicidal thoughts. Typically, the hotline responder will listen to you and help you develop options or solutions other

than suicide. The person you talk with may work with you on your safety plan, so it can be helpful to have your 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.

Participate in a Support Group

There are many types of support groups; some are facilitated by mental health professionals, and others are led by peers with lived experience. Learning from others and sharing your experience can make a big difference in the way you think about your life.

Participate in Positive Activities

Finding a hobby or enjoying a favourite passtime such as listening to music, watching your favourite movie, or crafting is a great way to help you cope when things get tough. 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 joy.

Spirituality

Spirituality is not necessarily religion, but it can incorporate faith, your sense of belonging in the world, and the purpose and meaning you feel in life. Spirituality may be a way of centering and focusing on your values, beliefs and principles. Spirituality can become an important part of recovery, and you may want to explore different opportunities to develop or engage with your spirituality.

Building Community

Building community can also be a helpful part of recovery. Becoming involved with your local community centre, public library, or volunteering with a community organization are all ways you can begin to build positive relationships and a sense of belonging. Contributing positively to the lives of others can help to develop self-worth, purpose, and meaning.

Final Thoughts

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

Recovery is possible and help is always available.

Resources

Below is a list of organizations that may provide information, programs, or services which may be beneficial on your recovery journey.

Canadian Mental Health Association Waterloo -Wellington:

www.cmhaww.ca

Self-Help and Peer Support Waterloo-Wellington

www.cmhaww.ca/services/self-help-peer-support/

Centre for Addiction and Mental Health:

www.camh.ca

Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention:

www.casp.ca

Centre for Suicide Prevention

www.suicideinfo.ca



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