



I'm Having Thoughts of Suicide

There are many crisis centres available 24 hours a day to talk to you. [Find a crisis centre](#)

Thoughts of suicide can sneak up on some people when they are not expecting it. For others, they can come and go and still for others, they always seem to be in the back or front of their mind.

If you are experiencing suicide-related thoughts, you need to know that you're not alone. By some estimates, as many as one in six people will think seriously about suicide at some point in their lives.

What You Need To Know About Suicide Related Thoughts

Suicide-related thoughts can mean different things for different people. They can be an early warning sign that a person is under a lot of stress and worry. They can be the result of intense feelings that a person doesn't know how to name or how to cope with. For others, suicide related thoughts can be tied to a diagnosed mental illness such as a major depression, posttraumatic stress disorder, an anxiety disorder, schizophrenia, or substance use.

Having these thoughts can be scary for some and for others, may be perceived to be a comfort as they believe that it may offer a choice or some control when things feel overwhelming and insurmountable.

When thoughts of suicide arise, know that "your brain is not your friend". We know that the intensity of the feelings and thoughts interfere with a person's ability to problem solve.

Living and dealing with these thoughts can be helped through treatment. It's not easy and still, neither the thought nor the feelings will end a person's life; it's what you do with those thoughts and feelings. Treatment is not one size fits all. Different treatments work better for some people and at different times in their lives.

If you find you are thinking of suicide and can't think your way out of those thoughts, reach out to a friend, a family member, clergy member, crisis line, therapist or counsellor. They may help you see alternatives, even if just for the time being, to help you keep yourself safer.

Will the thoughts go away?

The intensity of thoughts of suicide will wax and wane and for some, they may experience these thoughts only once in their lifetime. There can be moments or even days or years of comfort, relief, contentment, even humour or joy, in the midst of experiencing thoughts and feelings that in the moment seem to “never go away”. An example might be that even if my life is falling apart, I can still smile when I eat my favourite food while petting my cat. I can go on a vacation or a day trip and get some relief from the intensity of the thoughts, for the time being.

Reasons for living or engaging with possibilities of a future can help manage the current pain.

If you are experiencing thoughts of suicide, it's hard to think of the big picture of a future. That's because your brain has engaged in what is called “constricted thinking”. Break it down into smaller chunks. “Future” might mean until the next commercial, an hour, a day, a month, or a year. Some people find it helpful to have pictures of people they care about or who care about them; a card or letter from someone important to them; a poem, painting, or song, nearby to remind them they are cared about. Some people find distraction activities helpful, a crossword puzzle, word search, movie, online games, exercising or dancing are some ideas.

Do not keep suicidal thoughts to yourself!

By sharing your thoughts with someone who can hear your distress, you are no longer holding “the secret” alone. There is no shame to thoughts of suicide. The thoughts are giving you important information that all is not well. There are people who are willing and able to help. Talk to someone, a friend, therapist, clergy member, family member, or teacher and let them know you are wanting their help because the situation feels so horrible. If the first person you try to talk to doesn't get it, try someone else. Not everyone has the skills and where some people are good at “doing” things, others are good at listening. Pick someone or a resource you think will be best at the moment.

Having Hope

Hope can be as simple and as profound as the voice of another human being who appears to hear our fear.

What is it? Is it a curse or blessing or both? The sense of having no hope deepens our despair. One of the worst things we say to another human being is that they are hopeless.

We speak of being hopeful...of feeling hopeless. We cannot give another person hope. Reality teaches us that what is hope to one may be a burden to another. In other words, my hope is not your hope. The challenge is to find a definition of hope that is truly our own.

The key to this illusive concept of hope is finding our own definition of what it means in the midst of life.

As we struggle with darkness, fear, despair and apathy we can feel that there is no hope. Perhaps that feeling comes from our understanding of what hope has been in the past. Perhaps what we experience in the extremity of struggle is a whole new definition of hope.

Victor Havel writes, "Hope is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense regardless of how it turns out."

Experience teaches us that our understanding of hope changes throughout our lifetime. When we are children hope is what makes us happy. As we age, hope is a goal, a vision, a dream. It is far less immediate. Something we might attain, rather than a state we can dwell in, right here and right now.

Hope, at the darkest moments in our life, is not a comprehensive commitment to faith and belief. At those times hope can be as simple and as profound as the voice of another human being who appears to hear our fear; hope can be the knowledge that the sun will rise tomorrow, hope can be the smell of fresh spring rain, or the first snowflake, or the photo of someone we love. When despair seems to overcome us we feel disconnected, isolated, lost. What we need most in those moments is a means of re-connection, relationship and belonging. This "means" can be surprisingly simple or deeply complex. What matters at the moment is that we find this path of meaning in this life, here and now.

As someone who studied the science of hope, Ronna Jevne writes, "Hope; we ridicule those who have too much of it. We hospitalize those who have too little. It is dependent on so many things yet indisputably necessary to most. Those who have it live longer. Words cannot destroy it. Science has overlooked it. A day without it is dreadful. A day with an abundance of it guarantees little."

If you are reading these words; you have hope. Try not to compare it with anyone else's expression of hope. Try not to get caught in the dualism of good – bad, hopeful and hopeless, worthwhile and worthless...the only kind of hope that will succeed is one that melts all the need of competition and comparison. When we can come to this understanding we experience a sense of peace, both within and beyond ourselves. In this state we trust life to be a journey of adventure, meaning and worth.

Imagine hope as an energy that melts the difference between life and death. Life then is no longer either/or, it becomes more than we can even imagine. Ending life then is not the option for the end of struggle because life is not an endurance test of endless struggle. It is rather a mixture of struggle and strength. This is radical hope because it is often born in a sense of hopelessness. It is a new definition of the meaning of hope, which is not about happiness – rather it is about fullness, meaning and connection. It is being constantly reshaped and redefined, and it is constantly inviting us to the never-ending story of life's meaning. This is how hope becomes energy for whatever we have to face in life. It is not optimism, rather it is strength of seeking and realism.

Hope irks many professionals. Professionals are trained to know. Yet the choice is ours to make in relation to hope. We can open ourselves to the mystery or stay with the illusion of certainty.

Books abound on the topic of hope, but before you begin reading take some time to read from the book of your own life. Here some questions that may help you define your meaning of hope:

- Who are the most hopeful people you have known in your life?
- Who would you call to help with your hope right now?
- What images do you have of hope: music, smells, objects, colors, etc.?
- How do you nurture and care for your hope? What do you do to increase and strengthen it?
- What most threatens your hope?
- What do you think false hope is?
- Where do you look for hope when you feel hopeless?
- Can you remember a story of hope from your own life?
- When you close your eyes and try to imagine a picture of hope, what do you see?
- What most threatens your hope?
- If a child asked you right now, "What is hope?" how would you respond?
- Do you have a practice of hope? What if you began each day asking, what do I hope for on this day? What if you ended each day with the reflective question, "Where did I find hope today?"