

Talking about Suicide



 mind Bristol

Why should you read this guide?

It can be an out-of-the-blue phone call, a post on social media, or hearing about someone from a friend; many have felt the traumatic effects of suicide.

On average 48 people die of suicide every year in Bristol*

According to a Samaritans survey, 60% said their suicidal thoughts had been interrupted by someone close to them, like a friend or family member.

14% said their suicidal thoughts had been interrupted by a stranger or someone they didn't know.**

Suicidal thoughts can be interrupted; suicide can be prevented.

*JSNA Health and Wellbeing Profile 2025/26

**www.samaritans.org/support-us/campaign/world-suicide-prevention-day/

Concerned about someone?

You may have noticed a change in someone's behaviour, persistent low mood, a sense of hopelessness, or a lack of plans for the future. This person could be a friend, family member, or work colleague.

The stigma surrounding suicidal ideation can hold us back from reaching out for help or asking someone else if they are OK. Sometimes people are afraid they will “make it worse.” Don't be afraid to ask the question—research shows that a kind enquiry from a friend, colleague, or stranger can interrupt someone's suicidal thoughts or ideation.

- **Don't be afraid to ask**
- **You don't have to have all the answers**
- **Listening is enough**
- **Not everyone is ready to talk**

Finding the right words

Instead of saying:	Make an effort to say:	What difference does it make?
“Commit(ed) suicide”	• Died/death by suicide • Lost their life to suicide	Commit implies a crime and therefore it is something shameful.
“(Un)Successful Suicide”	• Died by suicide • Survived a suicide attempt • Lived through a suicide attempt	The implication of something being successful or unsuccessful can imply an achievement or failure.
“Someone is suicidal, or is feeling suicidal”	• Is experiencing suicidal ideation • Facing suicide • Has experienced suicidal thoughts	People are more than their suicidal thoughts. Due to the complexity of suicidal thoughts and ideation, speculation is not helpful.
“Calling someone a victim or sufferer of mental illness”	• Being treated for a mental illness • An individual who has a mental illness	This implies a lack of quality of life and a lack of autonomy.

Talking to someone who's experiencing suicidal thoughts:

Instead of saying:	Make an effort to say:	What difference does it make?
“Things aren’t so bad. Others have it worse. You’re just being dramatic.”	• Thank you for telling me. • You’re not alone. • Tell me more about how you’re feeling.	Encouraging engagement in a dialogue breaks the stigma around talking about mental health.
“Please don't do anything silly. Don't do anything stupid”	• Are you having suicidal thoughts? • Are you feeling suicidal? • Have you been thinking about killing yourself?	Asking direct and open-ended questions encourages honest responses. This approach demonstrates that you genuinely care about their feelings. Using the term "suicide" directly prompts them to reflect on the seriousness of their potential actions and shows that you are taking their emotions seriously.

Talking to someone who's experiencing suicidal thoughts:

Instead of saying:

“Are you doing this for attention?”

How can you be so selfish?

Why would you even think about that?”

Make an effort to say:

- I can't imagine how painful this must be for you. But I would like to do my best to understand.

What difference does it make?

Although hearing about someone's suicidal thoughts can be difficult to process, it must be taken seriously and without judgement or shame.

Avoid using reactive language, as this reassures someone that what they are thinking about isn't shameful.