

SUICIDE: Taking Care of Yourself After an Attempt



**Moving Ahead
After Your
Treatment in
the Emergency
Department**



The Nation's Voice on Mental Illness

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Recovering From a Suicide Attempt

To help set you on the path to recovery, this brochure 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 healthcare facility—all these can be overwhelming to you right now. But, recovery is possible and all the feelings you are probably 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) back to your home, 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.

The exact steps for follow-up care will vary with each person, but your plan might 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 follow-up care that you understand and are comfortable with, following every step of the plan is key to your recovery.

If the emergency department staff feels 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. One important thing to note—there is a hospital bed shortage in many parts of the country and it may take quite a while to find a hospital that can accept you. If this happens,

the hospital staff should work with you to create a safety plan as part of your discharge instructions until you can be admitted to a hospital.

Next Steps: Moving Ahead and 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. You may also 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 will 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.

“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.

Build a support system.

This is a key part of recovering from a suicide attempt and preventing another one. It is very 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 very 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 the clergy, mentor or colleague could also be helpful to you at this time. Having more than one ally can be a great asset, as well.

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, as much as you can at first, and build in more with time.

If you continue to have thoughts of suicide, reach out for help immediately and contact your ally, a doctor, or a crisis hotline (see the back pages of this brochure for listings). Listen closely and carefully consider the support and advice you receive. Again, it is very 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 can 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 may also want to consider adding some of these steps to your safety plan.

- *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 these items back 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 your local NAMI (see the back pages of this brochure) for more information about mental illness and treatment.

- *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 plan in place, the crisis staff will help you create a safety plan. See the resources listed at the back of this brochure for more information on crisis lines.

- *Participate in a mutual peer-support group:* There are many types of support groups, and your local NAMI may be able to connect you with a group in your area. Learning from others and sharing your experience can make a big difference in the way you think about your life. It may also help save the life of someone else.

The resources listed at the back of this brochure can link you to a number of peer-support centers in your area.

- *Get involved in life:* Finding a hobby or enjoying a favorite pastime—such as listening to music, watching your favorite 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 if your negative thoughts come back so you know you can turn to something that brings you comfort and enjoyment.

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.

To learn more about suicide and to get help, consider the following resources.

In a crisis, contact:

1-800-273-TALK (8255)

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

A 24-hour, toll-free crisis hotline funded by the federal government that will direct callers to a nearby crisis center. The Lifeline will accept calls from non-English speakers.

www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

For more information about suicide and mental illness:

American Association of Suicidology

A resource and education organization dedicated to the understanding and prevention of suicide.

www.suicidology.org or call 202-237-2280

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

Dedicated to advancing the public's knowledge of suicide and its prevention.

www.afsp.org or call 1-888-333-AFSP

American Psychiatric Association

A national advocacy organization of psychiatrists.

www.psych.org or call 703-907-7300

American Psychological Association

A national advocacy organization of psychologists.

www.apa.org or call 1-800-374-2721

Befrienders International/Samaritans

An online resource that gives support through e-mail and offers a directory of local crisis helplines.

www.befrienders.org

**The Covenant House Neline Hotline –
1-800-999-9999**

A 24-hour toll-free crisis hotline offering confidential and immediate crisis intervention and referrals to community resources.

www.covenanthouse.org/programs_nl.html

**Hispanic Community Resource Helpline –
1-800-473-3003**

(La Línea Nacional de Ayuda)

Offers support for Latinos who need information about educational, health and human service providers.

Link's National Resource Center for Suicide Prevention and Aftercare (LINK-NRC)

Provides suicide-related community education in the areas of prevention, intervention, aftercare and support.

www.thelink.org or call 404-256-9797

NAMI (The National Alliance on Mental Illness)

Offers information, support, and advocacy for persons affected by mental illnesses.

www.nami.org or call 1-800-950-NAMI (6264)

National Institute of Mental Health

NIMH is the lead federal agency for research on mental and behavioral disorders.

www.nimh.nih.gov or call 1-866-615-6464

The National Mental Health Association

Addresses all aspects of mental health and mental illness.

www.nmha.org or call 1-800-969-NMHA (6642)

The National Organization for People of Color Against Suicide

Addresses and raises awareness about the epidemic of suicide in minority communities.

www.nopcas.com or call 1-866-899-5317

National Strategy for Suicide Prevention

A comprehensive national plan to confront the suicide epidemic.

www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/suicideprevention

Suicide Awareness Voices of Education (SAVE)

Dedicated to preventing suicide through education, public awareness and stigma reduction.

www.save.org or call 952-946-7998

Suicide Prevention Action Network USA

A national organization dedicated to action and advocacy around suicide prevention.

www.spanusa.org or call 202-449-3600

Suicide Prevention Resource Center

Supports suicide prevention with the best of science, skills and practice.

www.sprc.org or call 1-877-GET-SPRC (438-7772)

The Trevor Helpline – 1-866-4U-TREVOR

A national 24-hour, toll-free suicide prevention hotline aimed at gay and questioning youth.

www.thetrevorproject.org

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What is NAMI?

The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) is the national umbrella organization for more than 1,200 local support and advocacy groups in all 50 states for families and individuals affected by serious mental illness.

A grassroots, self-help organization, NAMI is dedicated to improving the lives of people with severe, biologically based brain disorders. Our mission is to provide education about severe mental illnesses and to support increased funding for research and quality services. Members of NAMI are families, friends, and people suffering from severe mental disorders such as depressive illness.

To learn more about your local NAMI group, call your state's NAMI office, contact the NAMI Information and Services Center at 1-800-950-6264 or write to:

NAMI

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Other information can be found by visiting our web site, www.nami.org.

Your Notes Here:



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