

# A GUIDE FOR THE FAMILY AND FRIENDS OF SOMEONE EXPERIENCING SUICIDAL THOUGHTS AND BEHAVIORS



We are keenly aware of the distress that you and your loved one are facing at this difficult time. This experience may feel similar to other serious medical conditions such as a heart attack or stroke, yet, unlike a heart attack or stroke, there may be stigma for both you and your loved one, complicating the incident. Therefore, we hope you will find the following guidelines and suggestions helpful in support of your journey.

## **Know that the clinical team will work to understand:**

- What psychiatric or medical issues are contributing to the suicidal condition.
- Whether the suicidal thoughts and behavior are a result of a recent event or are part of a long-standing condition.
- The history of any previous attempts.
- Risk factors that are currently present such as; interpersonal discord, legal, financial, employment/career/ school, job loss or the loss of a friend or family member.
- Any regrets or relief that the person may have from having survived a suicide attempt.

## Information about your loved one is very important for the clinical team, including:

- Access to a gun, or other lethal means of suicide
- Discontinuation of medications
- Discontinuation of treatment with a mental health provider or physician
- Writing about suicide, including on social media
- Giving possessions away or recent creation of a will
- Involvement in an abusive relationship, currently or previously
- Misuse of alcohol or drugs
- Anniversary of a troubling period in their life or a current loss/stressors
- Past history of mental illness or family history thereof
- Recent changes in behavior or sleep patterns

It would also be helpful to know about any other health care treatments and if a Guardian or Durable Power of Attorney for healthcare is in place.



## Wellness tips:

- Ensure, as best as possible, that your family member or friend is supported and not alone; just as you would for someone coming home from surgery.
- Remember the basics of hydration; nourishing food and sleep are as important for the brain and central nervous system as they are to other systems of the body.
- Limit exposure to alcohol. Alcohol use decreases judgment and disturbs sleep.

## Controlling access to lethal means:

Research shows that a person who has attempted suicide or is suicidal in their thinking is at a higher risk of dying by suicide. A person experiencing suicidal thoughts and behaviors has a difficult time making healthy choices. As a family member/friend, you can help your loved one make more effective, life enhancing choices while reducing the risk of death from suicide.

### Risk can be reduced by:

- Removing & securing all firearms. Guns hold the highest risk means of death for suicidal people.
- Remove unused or expired medications from the home. Lock up or minimize the inventory of all other medications including over-the-counter prescription, such as Advil and Tylenol. Overdoses are common and can be lethal.

## Be honest, genuine and direct with your family member or friend; they need your support. Stay within your own healthy limits.

- Try to determine whether your family member/friend feels safe and is comfortable with their treatment plan and providers.
- Work with them to ensure follow-up care by removing common barriers such as transportation, childcare or their feelings of hopelessness.
- Help them to address practical issues like paying bills, cleaning, shopping, communications with work or other responsibilities. It is important to help them to feel a level of control.
- Know that simply being present (even without conversation) is healing and comforting.
- Assure your family member/friend that it is okay to express their thoughts and feelings. Like anyone with a serious condition, they will feel a need to talk. You do not have to be “the fixer,” just listen.
- Let them know that they are important to you and that you will do your best to support them into and through recovery. Maintain a vision of hope; a vision they may not be able to see at this moment.

We hope that with your loved one's permission we can work together to:

- Develop a comprehensive care plan going forward.
- Support your family member/friend to ensure that barriers to follow-up care are identified and removed.
- Be clear as to your role in the plan for safety.
- Be clear on the warning signs and criteria to return to the emergency room or to call our Mobile Crisis Response Team.

**Take care of yourself:**

Caring for a family member or friend is physically and emotionally exhausting. Never go it alone!

Get support from friends, relatives and organizations such as the National Alliance on Mental illness (NAMI), [www.namih.org](http://www.namih.org). Seek professional input whenever possible.



Remember, you do not have to travel this road alone. We are here to help. Our Mobile Crisis Response Team is a phone call away 24/7/365.

**Call (800) 688-3544**

**[www.mhcgm.org](http://www.mhcgm.org)**

The Mental Health Center of Greater Manchester is the largest outpatient behavioral health provider in the state of New Hampshire.

To schedule an appointment call (603) 668-4111 option 4.