



KCR
COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Central Okanagan Communities

SUICIDE PREVENTION HANDBOOK

We all have a role to play in preventing suicide.
This guide is designed to help you recognize warning signs,
know what to say, and when and how to take action.
Suicide is preventable, and together, we can save lives.



Suicide Crisis Helpline
Ligne d'aide en cas de
crise de suicide



KG FOUNDATION
Kiwanis Legacy Fund



Interior Crisis Lines
1.888.353.CARE(2273)
Your community safety net of C.A.R.E.



Public Health
Agency of Canada

Agence de santé
publique du Canada

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The Okanagan Suicide Awareness Society,
Regional District of Central Okanagan, and
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INTENT OF THIS HANDBOOK

This resource was developed due to the critical need for continuing education and accessible information around proactively and positively responding to an individual's risk of death by suicide.

Suicide is defined as the act of deliberately ending one's own life. A suicide attempt is when an individual tries to end their life but does not die. In the Central Okanagan, many families and friends have been devastated by the suicide of a loved one. In fact, the Interior Health region had the highest rate of suicide deaths in B.C in 2018—approximately 16 deaths per 100,000.

While the resources provided throughout this guide can help you recognize when someone might be struggling, it's not uncommon for them to follow through and have kept their plans hidden. Suicide griever sometimes blame themselves, believing they should have done more, listened more, or paid more attention. Losing someone is tremendously hard, but suicide is not your fault. If you are a survivor or griever and need support, we encourage you to call the crisis line at 1-888-353-2273 or make an appointment with a professional.

For the individuals who communicate their distress, we believe that knowing the signs and what you can do to help will save lives. Together, we can create a future without stigma and more mental health awareness within our communities.

According to the Government of Canada¹...

- More than 10 Canadians die by suicide every day.
- There are approximately 25 to 30 attempts to every suicide death.
- For children, youth, and adults (10-29 years), suicide is the second leading cause of death. Males account for 41% of 10-14 year old suicides, increasing to 70% of 15-19 year olds.
- Suicide rates are higher among men than women, but women have a higher rate of self-harm which is a risk factor for suicide.
- There is a strong association between suicide and mental health concerns, particularly mood disorders, such as depression and bipolar disorder.
- Due partly to the stigma against mental illness and suicide, rates of suicide are likely underestimated.

¹ <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/suicide-prevention.html>

SUICIDE WARNING SIGNS

Suicide can affect everyone regardless of gender, race, income, and ethnicity. Someone thinking about suicide usually feels intense and overwhelming emotional pain characterized by sadness, anger, guilt, shame, emptiness, and hopelessness. Unfortunately, it's not always possible to know when someone we care about is thinking about suicide, but there are some signs to be aware of.

Dramatic Changes in Behaviour	Normally active people may complain of being tired; cautious people may start taking unusual risks. Dramatic mood changes and any significant behaviour change may be cause for special concern.
Self-Neglect	Self-neglect may manifest in different ways such as disregarding one's appearance through a lack of hygiene or intentionally failing to satisfy one's nutritional and/or medical needs (for example, not eating or not taking prescribed medication).
Problems in School or Work	A dramatic drop in performance or grades, falling asleep at their desk, emotional outbursts or another behaviour that is uncharacteristic of a particular student or coworker may be cause for concern.
Gathering Materials	Individuals making a plan for suicide may seek a means to kill themselves. For example, they could look to purchase firearms, weapons, rope, extra medication, drugs, or poison. They may also search online for ways to end their life.
Excess Substance Abuse	Alcohol and other drug abuse appear to be significantly linked to increased risk-taking and suicide attempts. If you notice alcohol and drug use increasing, this behaviour could be a concern to address.
Themes of Death	A desire to end one's life may show up in the person's artwork, poetry, essays, choice of music, or preoccupation with an occult group or activity.

WARNING SIGNS CONTINUED

Previous Suicide Attempt(s)	A significant number of people who die by suicide have attempted suicide before.
Withdrawal From Life	Withdrawing from classes or work, friends & family, sleeping too much (or too little), and visiting or calling to “say goodbye” can all be warning signs to take seriously.
Verbal Statements	Someone who is thinking of suicide may make comments such as “life is not worth it,” “you would be better off without me,” “I wish I were dead,” “I don’t know if I can go on,” or “you won’t have to worry about me for much longer.” These statements should always be taken seriously. Comments about having no reason to live, feeling trapped, experiencing unbearable pain, feeling hopeless or in despair, and stating an intent to hurt or kill oneself are all warning signs of serious suicide risk.
Giving Away Possessions	Someone who has decided to attempt suicide may start giving away their possessions, such as clothing, books, or other valuables.
Suicide Rehearsal Behaviour	Any form of suicide rehearsal behaviour is a warning sign of immediate suicide risk. For example, practicing tying a noose, repeatedly visiting a bridge, or taking a sub-lethal dose of drugs.
Mental Health	If the person has suffered a recent painful loss, setback or humiliation, or is experiencing prolonged grief from previous losses or troubling events, the addition of other listed warning signs may increase the risk of suicide.

HOW TO SUPPORT SOMEONE WHO IS CONSIDERING SUICIDE

A person who is thinking about suicide is feeling intense and overwhelming emotional pain. They may feel sadness, grief, anger, guilt, shame, emptiness, or hopelessness. They may feel like they are in a crisis.

It may not be possible to easily or fully resolve the problems causing their intense feelings, but alternatives exist aside from suicide. The person simply cannot see any other options right now.

Reaching out for help is a sign of courage and wisdom—not of weakness or shame. A friend, counsellor, or spiritual guide—a caring person like you—can hear and understand a person's pain and assist them.

If someone discloses that they are considering suicide:

- Listen actively and be supportive.
- Refrain from any judgement, giving advice, or attempting to talk them out of it.
- Do not agree to keep their thoughts and feelings about suicide a secret.
- Do not leave them alone.
- Take action by removing means and assisting them to get the help they need.
- Offer hope to help them see options other than suicide.
- Refer them to a local crisis line (1-888-353-2273) or a suicide prevention service (call 1-833-456-4566, 24/7, or text 45645, 4pm-midnight EST).
- Always contact 9-1-1 if the individual is in immediate danger.



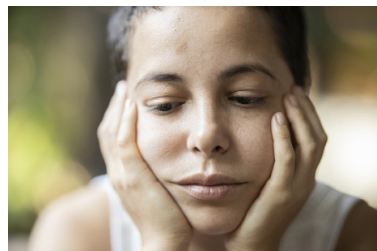
Suicide can be prevented.

While people don't always admit to thinking about suicide, knowing the signs can start the conversation. You are taking a big step in helping others by reading this workbook. The information and resources outlined will empower you to provide support and potentially save lives.

WHAT NOT TO SAY

Without any education or formal training, it can be challenging to know how to respond when someone says they are thinking about suicide.

While you may have good intentions, you could unintentionally cause the individual to feel rejected, unheard, alone, criticized, or even guilty.



Here are some responses to avoid when supporting someone who is feeling suicidal:

- Abstain from trying to find an easy solution to the person's problem.
- Avoid telling the person to 'cheer up,' 'it's not that bad,' 'stay positive,' 'snap out of it' or any other response that may minimize how they are feeling.
- Don't immediately change the subject.
- Avoid telling them they shouldn't feel that way and saying things like, "other people have it worse" or "you're being selfish."
- Don't deny their distress or ask, "why would you want to die? You have so much to live for."
- Refrain from using religious beliefs against the person, such as, "you'll go to hell."
- Avoid making statements that express disbelief, such as "you don't seem sad!" or "you haven't been acting any different."
- Don't blame the person or deny their feelings by saying things like, "it's all in your head" or "you're imagining things."
- Don't ignore the person.
- Avoid using platitudes such as, "you'll get over it" or "this too shall pass."



FACTORS THAT INCREASE THE RISK OF SUICIDE

Certain characteristics and events can increase the risk of suicide. While most people will not attempt, it is difficult to know when someone will act on suicidal thoughts.

The comprehensive list below indicates factors to watch out for that may cause someone to be at a higher risk for danger and immediate attention.

Social Factors

- Factors threatening lifestyle such as legal difficulties, financial hardship, and others.
- Stressful events that affect feelings of hope and security.
- History of abuse or bullying (cyber or direct confrontation).
- Having a close friend die by suicide.
- Ongoing friction between the individual and the home, work, or school environment.
- Absence of available safety or support systems.
- Social isolation.
- Ongoing conflicts, arguments, or break-ups in a parental and/or personal relationship.
- Recent televised program or movie detailing suicide—without an educational component.
- Rejection, ostracism, victimization because of being LGBTQ2SAI+, Indigenous, or other socially targetable minority.

Family History

- Early childhood experiences of parental loss through death, separation, or emotional deprivation.
- History of suicide attempts or suicide in the family.
- Family members with psychiatric problems (mood disorders, alcohol and/or other drug problems).

Emotional, Psychological, & Physical Factors

- Medical problems (including chronic and life-threatening) especially if the prognosis is worsening or a chronic disability.
- Feeling depressed, hopelessness, despair, or unable to experience pleasure.
- High level of anxiety or panic attacks.
- Recent accumulation and/or feelings of loss, failure, rejection, pressures, criticisms, punishment, public humiliation, shame, or unwanted changes.
- History of school/work problems including learning disabilities and cognitive deficits.
- Hallucinations.
- Alcohol and/or other drug abuse (prescription and over-the-counter drugs included).
- Self-harm (self-inflicted injury).
- Persistent insomnia.
- Pattern of agitation and/or generalized impulsivity.
- Sustained loss of ability to concentrate and/or generalized indecisiveness.
- History of antisocial behaviour.
- Easy access to lethal means to kill oneself.

FACTORS THAT GUARD AGAINST THE RISK OF SUICIDE

With factors that increase the risk of suicide, there are also characteristics and events that can help reduce the risk of death.

The more protective factors a person has, the more guarded they are against suicide.

Protective Factors

- Connectedness and positive relationships with family, friends, community, and culture.
- Coping and problem-solving skills.
- Ability to adapt to change.
- Effective clinical care for mental, physical, and substance abuse disorders.
- Support from ongoing medical and mental health care professionals.
- Cultural and/or religious beliefs that discourage suicide and support valuing of life.
- Optimism, hope for the future, and compelling reasons for living.
- Easy access to a variety of clinical interventions and support for help seeking.
- Impulse control, a sense of personal control, and sense of self-worth.
- Restricted access to a means to kill oneself.



RECOMMENDED (Re)ACTIONS

Reassurance, kindness, and support can help someone to recover from a difficult time.

At the beginning of the handbook (see section *How to Help Someone Who is Considering Suicide*) we listed some actions to take if someone discloses that they are feeling suicidal.

Below, we build on that list to help you further develop your skills to support someone in a time of need.

Take the Problem Seriously	Whatever the problem, validate the person’s attempt to explain it and the feelings related to it. Sometimes a person may fear they are going to be perceived as dramatic or attention-seeking. No matter what, especially if the individual says they are thinking about suicide, always take their words seriously.
Be a Good Listener	Be calm, speak quietly & gently, and listen carefully. Look for non-verbal clues that show how the person is feeling and report what you see. For example, you could say, “You seem sad. What’s going on for you right now?”. Wait for a response. You don’t need to find a solution to what they are going through or completely understand their experience, just listen and be present to show them you care.
Be Direct	Talking openly is the only way you can find out how serious the person is about ending their life. For example, you can say, “Are you thinking about suicide?”. If they say yes, asking if they have a plan is an important step in assessing risk level. Asking someone directly if they are feeling suicidal will not “put the idea” into their heads or make it more likely to happen.

Validate the Person's Feelings	Feelings are not right or wrong—they ARE. By compassionately tuning into the person's present emotions, you will learn the depth of their pain and show that you care. For example, you could try saying, <i>"It sounds like you are feeling overwhelmed, and I appreciate you sharing that with me."</i> Or, <i>"You are going through a lot right now, and I'm concerned about you because I care. How can I best support you right now?"</i>
Show That You Care	Advise the person you are available to listen and talk about the things that are troubling them. Be mindful of body language; a warm expression and physical contact, such as touching a hand (with permission), may reassure the individual that you care.
Stay With the Person	If you suspect there may be any immediate danger, don't leave the person alone. Remove access to lethal weapons, drugs, ropes, and vehicles. Availability of mood-altering substances (legal and illicit drugs & alcohol) usually reduces inhibitions and may increase the chance of an impulsive action that can potentially cause death.
Help Them Create a Safety Plan	<i>Please see the page 11 for a more in-depth description.</i>
Get Help	Seeking professional help is a must. Although sometimes despair and hopelessness can disappear, these emotions can develop to a point where a person may impulsively see suicide as the only way out.
Follow Up	After connecting the person to professional help, follow up to determine if they are accessing help/resources and whether their perspective on life may have changed. If you feel comfortable, let the individual know you are there for continued support should they need it.

Safety Planning

A safety plan is a document that can support an individual through extreme overwhelm and thoughts of suicide. If the individual has previously contacted a crisis line or has a healthcare provider, they will likely already have a safety plan. If they don't, you can create one with them:

•Identify warning signs of suicidal thoughts.	•Create a list of reasons to live and things that have kept the individual alive.
•List coping strategies that can divert suicidal thoughts, such as meditation, watching a movie, listening to music, or exercising.	•List the steps to get to a safe place, such as arranging to have a trusted friend or family member pick the person up or giving pills to a friend.
•Write out the names and contact information for all people that can be reached during a crisis.	•Identify any mental health providers and the hours they can be reached, as well as emergency contact numbers.

The individual should keep the safety plan documents accessible and rely on it if/when suicidal thoughts occur.

HOW TO CARE FOR YOURSELF WHILE SUPPORTING SOMEONE ELSE

Dealing with suicide can feel stressful and overwhelming. Whether it's someone you love, an acquaintance, or an individual in your community, it's important to care for yourself when supporting another in a crisis.

Self-care looks different for everyone. Some people find it helpful to talk to a friend or loved one. Others find it beneficial to call or text a crisis line or make an appointment with a therapist. Below are some self-care strategies that you can try when supporting someone or anytime you're feeling anxious or overwhelmed.

Self-care activities that you may find beneficial to decompress:

- **Practice mindfulness:**

Focusing on one thought, feeling, or task at a time improves mental clarity and relieves stress and anxiety.

- **Give thanks:** Gratitude practices are proven to improve our psychological well-being and lower feelings of stress, anxiety, and depression.

- **Meditate:** Meditation creates inner calm and peace, which reduces stress and anxiety and enables us to focus on our physical and psychological needs.



- **Exercise:** When we are active, our body releases endorphins and serotonin (hormones that contribute to happiness and well-being) and reduces our cortisol levels (the hormone related to stress).

- **Relax:** Taking time for ourselves is critical to replenishing our mental and physical resources.

- **Spend time outdoors:** Research says that spending time in nature reduces stress, lessens anxiety, and boosts our overall mood.



DIRECTORY OF PRIMARY SERVICES

These and other Central Okanagan Resources can be found online in the KCR Online Directory of Community Services: kelowna.cioc.ca.

Emergency Numbers		
Crisis Line	The Interior Crisis Line Network provides confidential telephone crisis intervention through active listening and support.	1-888-353-2273 kcr.ca/family-services/crisis-line/
Ambulance, Police, and Fire Department	For emergency support, call 9-1-1 to reach paramedics, the fire department, or the RCMP.	9-1-1
BC Suicide Helpline, Crisis Centre of BC	A 24/7 distress line dedicated to helping British Columbians experiencing thoughts of suicide or those looking to get support for someone who is. Also has online crisis chat from noon to 1am for BC youth and adults.	1-800-784-2433 (1-800-SUICIDE) crisiscentre.bc.ca/
9-8-8	Provides 24/7 suicide prevention and crisis support to people across Canada through phone and text.	Phone: 9-8-8 Text: 9-8-8 crisisservicescanada.ca/en/
Community Crisis Response Team, Interior Health	Provides crisis response for individuals needing support who are not in immediate need of Emergency Services (9-1-1). Completes risk assessments, mental health assessments, and resource navigation over the phone or in-home.	250-212-8533

Kelowna General Hospital	Provides Central Okanagan's primary acute care health services.	250-862-4000
Poison Control Centre	Provides emergency phone line 24-hours every day for advice and information about poisoning.	1-800-567-8911 dpic.org
Kids Help Phone	Canada's only 24/7 national service offering professional counselling, information, referrals and volunteer-led, text-based support for kids.	1-800-668-6868 kidshelpphone.ca/
Emergency Shelters		
Kelowna's Gospel Mission (men's shelter)	Provides food, shelter, recovery, meals (breakfast, lunch, dinner and snacks), and care for those in need.	250-763-3737 kelownagospelmission.ca
Kelowna Women's Shelter	Offers a safe place to stay, with essentials such as food, clothing, and toiletries for women who have to flee quickly. Serving women in need from Oyama to Peachland, they provide ongoing counselling, support and preventive education programs, all at no cost.	250-763-1040 kelownawomensshelter.ca
NOW Canada (women's Shelter)	Provides client-centered care for women, youth, and their children who are vulnerable, exploited or homeless. Offers emergency shelter (Alexandra Gardner Women and Children Safe Centre) as well as transitional housing and affordable, independent living to women, with and without children, who have a proven financial need.	250-763-2262 nowcanada.ca

Okanagan Boys and Girls Club Youth Shelter	Provides a voluntary resource for youth ages 13-18 who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and have no safe alternatives. Youth may refer themselves to the program or be referred by anyone in the community, including MCFD and other youth serving organizations.	250.868.8541 ext. 202 bgco.ca
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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Children, Youth, & Students

Foundry (youth 12-24)	Foundry Kelowna is a wellness centre where young people aged 12-24 and their families can find hope, help and support, when they need it.	236-420-2803 foundrybc.ca/kelowna
Bridge Youth & Family Services Society	Offers support to youth & families in the Okanagan. They work preventatively with new parents and their infants, support families with various programs, and provide detox and recovery programs to youth and adults.	250-763-0456 thebridgeservices.ca
Child & Youth Mental Health	Provides a range of mental health assessment and treatment options for children and youth (0-18 years of age) and their families at no cost.	250-861-7301 https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/managing-your-health/mental-health-substance-use/child-teen-mental-health
Child Protection Services of BC	The Ministry of Children and Family Development provides child protection services for children and families. If you witness child abuse, believe a child to be in need of protection, or you yourself are experiencing child abuse, this contact will help you access services and make a report.	Office phone: 778-699-2272 Crisis & After Hours phone: 1-800-663-9122 https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/public-safety/protecting-children

Third Space Charity	Provides free, supportive care counselling for students and young adults, online or in-person.	thirdspacecanada.org
UBCO Health & Wellness	Provides a variety of health and wellness services, including mental health services, for students, faculty, and staff.	250-807-9270 https://students.ok.ubc.ca/health-wellness/
Anxiety Canada (for children, youth, and adults)	Increase awareness about anxiety disorders, promote education, and increase access to evidence-based resources and treatments. Offers free, evidence-based resources online.	604-620-0744 anxietycanada.com
Adults		
KCR Community Resources	A multi-service agency offering programs and projects in four overarching areas: community services, employment services, family & adoption services, and immigrant services.	250-763-8008 kcr.ca
Canadian Mental Health Association	Facilitates access to resources that people require to improve mental health and community integration, builds resiliency, and supports recovery from mental illness.	250-861-3644 cmhakelowna.com

Elizabeth Fry Society	Supports and empowers those affected by sexual abuse, exploitation or violence in relationship through taking action to stop violence against women and children in the community, taking action to move low income women out of poverty, and actively promoting the legal rights, justice and services for women.	250-763-4613 empowerific.com
John Howard Society	Offers services that support clients in providing and assisting with housing, community reintegration, advocacy, support with mental health and addictions.	250-763-1331 johnhowardbc.ca/
Ki-Low-Na Friendship Centre	Provides mental, emotional, physical and spiritual well-being of all peoples through the development of community-based services, while encouraging the community to preserve, share and promote Aboriginal cultural distinctiveness.	250-763-4905 www.kfs.bc.ca/
Living Positive Resource Centre	Provides harm reduction, prevention and education resource, and supportive services that focus on individual and community health and wellness to anyone living with, affected by, or at risk of HIV, Hep C, or related health issues.	778-753-5830 lprc.ca
Mental Health Individual & Family Support, BC Schizophrenia Society	Provides support, resources and education for families and friends of individuals living with schizophrenia and other major mental illnesses.	250-868-3119 bcsskelowna.org

Metro Community	Offers various services, programs, and ministries including: Sunday morning gatherings, hot lunches, public computers, free local and long-distance phone calls, Little Free Library, community garden, Metro UP Financial Asset & Literacy Foundation, Metro Moving Crew, volunteer income tax clinic, education grant, street survival packs.	778-478-9727 metrocommunity.ca
Okanagan Suicide Awareness Society	Kelowna-based registered charity whose goal is to raise awareness and to offer support to survivors of suicide loss.	250-300-7990 suicideawareness.ca
Outreach Urban Health, Interior Health	Provides primary health care services that include medical care, wound care and blood borne infection care, podiatry, harm reduction, addiction support, social work support, MSD support, and dental, psychiatric, and addiction referrals.	250-868-2230 click here for website
Police-Based Victims' Assistance (RDCO)	Provides services to victims/witnesses of crime and/or trauma who may or may not have reported the crime to police or be involved with the criminal justice system. All services offered are free of charge and are confidential.	250-470-6242 https://regionaldistrict.com/your-services/police-services/victim-services.aspx
Seniors Outreach & Resource Centre	Non-profit society, working to enhance the lives of seniors in Kelowna. By providing support and linking them to other needed services, they help isolated, aging seniors to maintain their dignity and independence, and to stay connected to their community and each other.	250-861-6180 seniorsoutreach.ca

GLOSSARY

Throughout this guidebook, there may be some terms you have heard before but require a refresher or some that are completely new. The glossary below is available to reference at any point to ensure you can easily understand the contents of this handbook.

Term	Definition
Suicide	Suicide is defined as the act of deliberately ending one's own life.
Suicide Attempt	A suicide attempt is when an individual tried to end their life but did not die.
Mood Disorders	According to the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA), mood disorders are a group of mental illnesses that affect how someone feels and thinks about themselves, other people, and life in general. Sometimes people's mood can get "stuck" on negative emotions, change a lot, or become extreme.
Depression	The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) defines depression as a type of complex mood disorder caused by various factors, including genetic predisposition, personality, stress and brain chemistry. While it can suddenly go into remission, depression is not something that people can "get over" by their own effort.
Bipolar Disorder	The Mayo Clinic defines bipolar disorder as a mental health condition that causes extreme mood swings that include emotional highs (mania) and lows (depression).
Means	Means are the methods one might choose to suicide. These could include rope, firearms, or poison, to name a few.
Occult Group	The dictionary defines occult as a belief that involves or relates to supernatural, mystical, magical powers, or phenomena.

Ostracism	To be ostracised means to be excluded from a society or group.
Victimization	Victimization is defined as the action of singling someone out for cruel or unjust treatment.
LGBTQ2SAI+	QMUNITY - BC's queer, trans, and Two-Spirit resource centre - uses this acronym which stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, two-spirit (2S), asexual/aromantic, and intersex. The "+" is intended to represent the diverse and ever-expanding ways in which we experience gender, sexuality, identity, and more. https://qmunity.ca/news/a-i-inclusion-statement/



Notes

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We all have a role to play in
preventing suicide.
Together, we can offer hope and
support to those who are struggling,
and save lives.

The Crisis Line
1-888-353-2273(CARE)
1-800-2433 (SUICIDE)
Text 9-8-8

kcr.ca/family-services/crisis-line/



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COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Enhancing Lives - Connecting Communities