

Moving forward...

Where can I get help in my community?

This brochure is meant for those who have experienced the suicide attempt of a loved one. It is not intended to be a complete guide - it only scratches the surface. Below are some additional resources that may be helpful to you, to loved ones, and to the person at risk.

- **Get support and professional input** through a family doctor or psychiatrist, a cultural or spiritual leader, a work, school or mental health counsellor, and/or a crisis line.
- **The Island Helpline 1-800-218-2885** is available toll-free, 24 hours and provides crisis intervention, support, information and referrals in a caring, confidential manner.
- **The Canadian Mental Health Association/PEI Division (CMHA)** has a variety of helpful programs and services including:
 - ◇ The two-day Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST) Workshop prepares participants to be ready, willing and able to respond to a person at risk of suicide.
 - ◇ The PEI Helping Tree is designed to inform those experiencing difficulties, of the many helping resources available throughout PEI.
 - ◇ The www.StickToLife.ca website has suicide prevention information including: warning signs, safety plans and links to resources.
 - ◇ With Hope in Mind is an eight-week family-to-family education and support program for those who have a family member with mental illness.
 - ◇ Various Support Groups provide information, understanding, and reassurance to individuals and/or family members.
 - ◇ CMHA's local Resource Libraries have information kits, books, pamphlets and DVDs on mental illness, suicide and related topics.
 - ◇ Visit CMHA's website, www.cmha.pe.ca

Responding...

If you notice warning signs of suicide such as talking about suicide, preparations for death, self-harm/cutting, avoiding others, extreme despair, hopelessness, impulsiveness, risk-taking, substance abuse, changes in mood, behavior, energy level, appearance, appetite, sleeping habits, you should:

1. **ASK** directly about thoughts of suicide.
2. **LISTEN** more than talk. In a patient, non-judgmental way, acknowledge their pain and concerns before exploring solutions and/or options for support.
3. **SEEK HELP** for the person at risk using the resources listed. Reassure them that help is available. If you're still unsure what to do or where to turn, call the Island Helpline for help, available toll-free, 24 hours, at 1-800-218-2885.
4. **If you have strong concerns about the immediate risk of suicide, do not leave the person unattended. Get him or her to the nearest ER for a suicide risk assessment.**

Crisis Numbers (Toll Free/24 hours)

Island Helpline.....1-800-218-2885
Kids Help Phone (<21 yrs.)1-800-668-6868
Native Youth Crisis Hotline1-877-209-1266

Prince County

CMHA/Prince County 436-7399
S'Side Community Mental Health 888-8180
CMHA/West Prince..... 853-3871
Alberton Community Mental Health..... 853-8670
O'Leary Community Mental Health 859-8781
Evangeline Community Health Centre 854-7259

Queens County

CMHA/PEI Division..... 566-3034
Comm. Mental Health (Richmond Ctr) 368-4430
Comm. Mental Health (McGill Ctr)..... 368-4911

Kings County

Montague Comm. Mental Health..... 838-0960
Souris Comm. Mental Health 687-7110

Other Web Sources

- www.metanoia.org/suicide
- www.kidshelpphone.ca
- www.teenmentalhealth.org
- www.befrienders.org

After a Suicide Attempt What Next? Information for Family & Friends



Canadian Mental Health Association
Prince Edward Island Division

After a Suicide Attempt...

If someone close to you has just attempted suicide, then this is certainly a difficult and confusing time. In an instant, your world has a new unsettling reality...one of shock and trepidation. You may feel like you're walking on eggshells, not knowing what to do or say.

After a suicide attempt, there are often many unanswered questions. However, now is not the time to press the person at risk for answers – we can shed light on some of your questions and concerns. It's time to find out what you can do to help prevent this from happening again. There is a lot you can do, and you don't have to do it alone. You should never be the only source of support for a person at risk. We can identify some additional supports for you to consider.

Why did this happen? There are no simple answers as to why your loved one attempted suicide and/or is feeling suicidal. The factors that come into play are complex and different for everyone - generally it's never just one thing, but rather a number of factors that, over time, set the stage for that individual becoming more vulnerable and/or less protected against both mental health problems and suicide.

Did they really want to die? Suicide is not so much about wanting to die, but rather about wanting to stop the unbearable pain someone is feeling inside. They often feel hopeless, helpless and worthless; are unable to feel the love and support of family and friends; unable to share their pain with those who care and can help. These feelings didn't happen overnight and they won't go away overnight either.

How could they do this to us? It is common to feel disappointed or angry with the person who has attempted suicide. However, sharing these feelings with them may not be helpful - it may add to their pain. Expressions of care and concern, along with support are what the person at risk needs now.

Will they do it again? No one can say with any certainty if they will attempt suicide again or not. Research tells us that those who have attempted suicide are 40 times more likely to die by suicide than someone who has never attempted and they seem to be particularly vulnerable in the weeks and months following a suicide attempt. Be aware that thoughts of suicide may still be present and that suicidal behavior can reoccur - the goals are to reduce the risks and to build a network of support for everyone involved.

What can I do to help? First, get professional help for the person at risk (read on to learn more). Second, learn all you can about suicide so you are better prepared to help your loved one through this difficult time. Third, take care of yourself. Draw on the support of those close to you. Eat well, stay active, get plenty of rest, and balance work with play.

A "person at risk" is one who has conscious thoughts of suicide and is at risk of dying by suicide.

Getting Professional Help

If the person is in the midst of a suicidal crisis or has made a suicide attempt, take them to your *local hospital's Emergency Department (ER)* for a suicide risk assessment. If your loved one will not accompany you to the ER or you don't feel safe in transporting them, contact ***emergency services for assistance (911)***.

Prince County Hospital (PCH) and the Queen Elizabeth Hospital (QEH) have ***Crisis Response Services*** available in the ER daily, to respond to those experiencing a mental health crisis, like suicide. While confidentiality guidelines may limit what health care professionals can share with you, it is vital that you share relevant information with them: any history of mental illness, addiction issues and/or suicide attempts, despairing personal writings or suicide notes, and

observations made by friends and family, teachers or co-workers. ER care, by its nature, is short-term and crisis oriented. Longer-term help may be necessary for the person at risk to work on the underlying sources of pain. The ER staff, family doctor or psychiatrist can help with follow-up referrals. Do not wait for a future crisis to seek assistance.

If the person at risk was seen in the ER or admitted to hospital and is now being released, the discharge/release plan should include a referral to ***Community Mental Health*** for follow-up support. Patients may also self-refer (contact numbers are included on the back). You and your loved one may talk to the doctor about treatments for mental illness and/or addiction issues, both of which increase suicide risk.

If you find out about an attempted suicide long after the event, perhaps through an old suicide note or casual comment, the person who attempted suicide may no longer be in crisis. However, you may be concerned that it could happen again. Reach out for information and support so that you are prepared to address this.

Reducing Risk at Home

- Secure or remove all firearms from the home.
- Have only small quantities of medications on hand and secure them in a locked cabinet.
- Remove misplaced ropes, vacuum hoses, belts or long cords from the bedroom, vehicle or other personal space of the person at risk.
- Create a safety plan: a joint effort between you, the person at risk, and their doctor about what to do and who to call if there is a concern or crisis.
- Keep the communication lines open. Talking about feelings helps to diffuse their intensity.
- Learn about warning signs and risk factors for suicide and how to respond in a crisis.
- Err on the side of caution. If you're unsure of the risk involved, get professional input.