



Helpful Questions for Suicide Prevention and Crisis Response Planning

Ask the Question Directly (consider SI vs DI):

- “Have you thought about ending your life or killing yourself?”
- “Have you had thoughts of death or dying? If so, have you thought you might play a role in making your death happen?”
- “Some people think about not being here or falling asleep and not waking up, while others think about actually doing something to enact their death. Are your thoughts more like the first ones or the second ones?”

Ask about Past Attempts or Behaviors:

- “Have you ever had a prior suicide attempt? If so, how did you attempt it? When was this? Did you receive medical attention? Have you ever tried to do anything or started to do anything to end your life?”
- “Have you ever had a prior suicide attempt? If so, how did you attempt it? When was this? Did you receive medical attention? Have you ever tried to do anything or started to do anything to end your life?”

Explain the State of Ambivalence:

- “When people think about killing themselves, most don’t truly want to die. They don’t want to live with their pain. Is that how you feel?”
- “If, for a moment, we could magically take away all the things in life that are so terrible, would you still want to die?”
- “What is keeping you alive right now?”
- “Take all the pain and put it aside in your mind for a moment; what is the most important thing to you in your life?”
- “You came in today for help, which suggests you’re not yet ready to end your life. Did you know that? What do you think about that?”

WARNING SIGNS

Help the person identify the elements of their suicidal mode, its precursors, and triggers (thoughts, feelings, behaviors, physiological symptoms). Ask them to list them, emphasizing which ones are the earliest they notice.

SELF MANAGEMENT

Help the person identify the coping skills they already use to manage these moments of suicidal distress. These may include distraction strategies, emotional regulation skills, physical activity, etc. Do not teach new skills in the first conversation—rely on what’s already working for them. If needed, remind them that if nothing was working, they would not be alive. Help them appreciate that they’ve been doing some things right to sustain life.

REASONS FOR LIVING

Since you already helped them discuss these, it’s time to list them and include how they will engage or involve themselves in them. It’s not enough to list the reasons for living. Have them use reminders (pictures, videos, etc.) of these for when people or things are not available.

SOCIAL SUPPORT

Identify people they can contact (phone, text, email, video, visit) for support. While the person doesn’t have to tell the loved one they are suicidal, it is helpful if they are willing, as it recruits more support.

CRISIS AND PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

Help them add the name and number of a medical or mental health provider for help during regular business hours. For after hours, help them identify a crisis option they are willing to use calling or texting 988, taking themselves to the hospital or calling 911 or a mobile crisis team, if available in their community.