




SAMH

Scottish Action for Mental Health

Suicide... Living with your thoughts



SUICIDE... LIVING WITH YOUR THOUGHTS

If you require this information in Word document format for compatibility with screen readers, please email:

info@samh.org.uk



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WHAT ARE SUICIDAL THOUGHTS?

If you're reading this then you might be thinking about suicide, and if you are then it's possible you're feeling any number of different emotions.

We're all different, and we all think about suicide differently.

You know better than anyone else what you've been through, what you're going through and how dark things can get for you. When you're experiencing pain, and possibly some of these emotions, you don't want to be 'assessed' or 'judged'. You might not find it helpful to hear somebody tell you that they understand – without being you, how can they understand? You might just want to be listened to by somebody who appreciates and recognises what you're going through and the place that you're in; or you might want to keep your thoughts to yourself. Maybe you're scared you'll upset someone?



Alone

Hopeless

Nothing

Depressed

Numb

Scared

Confused

Tired

Bleak

Dark

IS THINKING ABOUT SUICIDE NORMAL?


The quick answer is Yes! You may be surprised to know that thinking about suicide is very normal and really common. It's estimated that up to 1 person in 20 is thinking about suicide at any one time. In Scotland that means 262,740 people may be thinking about suicide – that's enough people to fill Hampden Park five times over!

That means that you're not alone, there are thousands of other people like you; people who might be struggling with thoughts of suicide, who, just like you, feel a whole number of different emotions.

“There have been times when my feelings of despair have been too much for me to take and I have reached a wall. It's a brick wall and it hits me hard. It feels so much bigger than me and it always comes at a time when I am so tired and I can't even think about how I will overcome it. That is when the thoughts start, the tunnel vision, where all I can think about is checking out.”

SUSAN

Thinking about suicide is not necessarily about wanting to die; it can be about not wanting to live, which is not the same thing. It can be a feeling that you can't keep going, it's too painful, too difficult or you can't see another solution to the pain or the problems.



1 person in 20 is thinking about suicide at any one time



LIVING WITH YOUR THOUGHTS OF SUICIDE

Living with thoughts of suicide is hard, especially when you're at your lowest and darkest. Every task can feel like a huge effort and the feelings of 'why bother?' can start to mount and create a vicious cycle of thinking.

This cycle can happen with anything – your family, your job, your friends, your hobbies. It can begin to feel like no matter what you do you are set to fail and it would be easier all round if you weren't here.

"When I am suicidal it's usually because I've been thinking that I'm useless. I feel sometimes that I'm a bit of a fraud and don't deserve to be a manager and that I'm indeed incapable of managing effectively. I also feel like I'm a rubbish husband and father and that my family would be a lot better off without me as all I do is ruin their lives."

JOE



Being in a place of pain and living with thoughts of suicide is difficult; making the decision to keep going, keep fighting and still be here is tough. But you're still here!



IF YOU'RE READING THIS THEN YOU'RE STILL ALIVE, WHAT'S KEEPING YOU ALIVE TODAY?

If you're still here then you still have something. Something that means you have not acted on your thoughts. What is it in your life that's still keeping you going, maybe even giving you hope?



It may be one of these things, it may be none of them. You're unique and you'll have things in your life that other people don't. The possible list of what could be keeping you going is endless.

"I have also tried hard to find what was keeping me here; I thought about the things in my life that I would miss if I wasn't here (my son growing up), it took me a while but I started looking for them, and holding onto them when I found them. They were, and are, my rock, the things that give me the strength to keep going."

SUSAN



Susan's story

"I learned to cope with my thoughts of suicide..."

20 years is a long time, and you would think that after 20 years of feeling suicidal (not constantly though) I would have made the decision to no longer be here! There have been times when my feelings of despair have been too much for me to take and I have reached a wall. In my mind it's a brick wall and it hits me hard, it's bigger than me and it would come at a time when I was so tired and I couldn't think about how I was going to overcome it. That is when the thoughts would start, the tunnel vision where all I would think about is checking out.

Once (or twice) when that wall has appeared I made an attempt to take my life... but since I'm writing this you will know that it didn't work out that way. Thankfully fate had other plans for me (I will always be grateful to the walker who took a different route that day) and I'm still here. That's right, I said thankfully, because things have changed, things have moved on and it's been 5 years since I was last confronted by that wall.

Initially I learnt to cope with my thoughts of suicide, accept that they were there and found a way to live with them, in the hope of overcoming them.

I know that something in my past caused me the pain I have felt, it is something that I cannot change so I have had to accept it and find a way to manage the memories and cope with how it has changed me as a person. It wasn't something that I managed by myself, I had to find the courage to talk to somebody else, seek their help and support to give me the strength.

I have also tried hard to find what was keeping me here, I thought about the things in my life that I would miss if I wasn't here (my son growing up), it took me a while but I started looking for them, and holding onto them when I found them. They were, and are, my rock, the things that give me the strength to keep going.



KEEPING YOURSELF SAFE IN A CRISIS

People can live with suicidal thoughts for years. Sometimes they are constant, always there at the back of the mind, and other times they can come and go. Sometimes the thoughts get too much and there may be times you feel that you need to act on those thoughts.

If you feel like this, then you don't have to act on your thoughts. You can choose to keep yourself safe, you can seek help from another person.

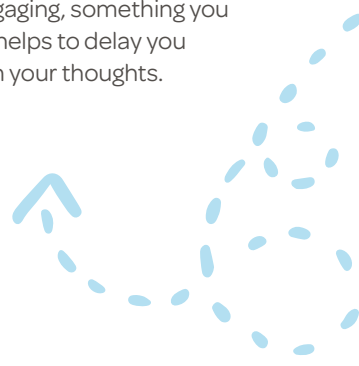
These are very 'big' choices to make, and this can be very difficult to do when your thoughts of suicide are all you can think about. You might want to think about how you will get through a crisis and make a plan for keeping yourself safe if you feel that the thoughts are becoming too much. It's best to do this at a time when you're not feeling overwhelmed by your thoughts and battling an urge to act on them.

PLANNING AHEAD

Keeping safe by yourself

This can feel like a huge responsibility if you're trying to cope alone, however if you have a plan to keep safe it might make it easier. Your plan might include:

- Identifying a safe place that you can go; this might be a place with people who you don't have to interact with if you don't want to (24-hour supermarket, library, etc.)
- Identifying helplines that you can call (please see page 16 for more information about helplines). Some helplines such as Breathing Space and the Samaritans are anonymous. This means you can talk with someone you don't know about how you are feeling.
- Thinking about other things that might help – this might be a physical activity or listening to music for example, something that you find calming or engaging, something you can do which helps to delay you from acting on your thoughts.





PLANNING AHEAD

Seeking help from others

Depending on who you'd like to seek support from in a crisis you may want to talk about how you're feeling with another person prior to a crisis occurring. That can be a big step: if you'd like help to do this please see page 17 for further information.

Your plan for seeking help from others may include:

- An emergency contact (family or friend) who is aware of your thoughts of suicide and is prepared to support you during a time of crisis
- Seeking help from a support organisation / helpline (see page 16 for different organisations and helplines that may be able to help in this situation)
- Calling NHS 24 on 111
- Attending A&E
- Calling 999

Other things to consider

Making a plan in case of a crisis is important, but there are other things that we do to cope that aren't always helpful.

Alcohol

Drinking can make you feel relaxed and happy initially but it can also cause you to feel even lower than you did before you started drinking, so if you felt low and awful when you started drinking it's likely that you'll feel even worse after you've had a few.

Drugs

Drugs change how you think, how you feel and how you behave. When you're feeling suicidal these changes could have very serious and negative effects causing you to take actions that you wouldn't normally take. Both alcohol and drugs can make you more impulsive and more likely to act on your thoughts.

Medication / prescribed drugs

Are you fully aware of the side effects of any prescription drugs you're taking? Sometimes medications will cause side effects causing you to feel lower than normal. 'Increased suicidal ideation' (having thoughts of suicide more often) is listed as a side effect of certain medications.

It's also worth checking whether your medication will work effectively if you drink or take drugs at the same time. Have a look at the Patient Information Leaflet which came with your prescription, speak to your doctor or pharmacist, or call NHS Inform on 0800 22 44 88.



Joe's story

"... there is always a new day..."

Please understand that this is my story, and it is unique to me, but I want to share it, I want you to see that other people share similar thoughts and struggle with suicidal thoughts.

Outwardly there are all the signs of success, a series of promotions at work, a loving family at home and a generally positive outlook on life. Yet some of my days and nights are filled only with thoughts of suicide.

When I'm in this suicidal frame of mind it's like a darkness descending over me, it's so oppressive I can think of nothing else other than ending my life. Suicidal thinking takes over my mind completely, there are many different triggers, I can be in an upbeat mood one day then suicidal the next. I've attempted suicide twice when I was much younger, both times I failed but never told anyone what I'd done.

When I'm suicidal it's usually because I've been thinking that I'm useless. I feel sometimes that I am a bit of a fraud and don't deserve to be a manager and that I am indeed incapable of managing effectively. I also feel like I'm a rubbish husband and father and that my family would be a lot better off without me as all I do is ruin their lives.

I have very high standards, sometimes I set them too high and make them unachievable so in effect I am setting myself up to fail, and when I feel like I've failed, the darkness descends and I become embroiled in a self-torturing cycle with no respite from the thought that I want to die.

No amount of reassurance or encouragement can lift me out of these moods, I simply have to 'ride them out'. I sometimes wonder why I'm still alive and haven't ended my life yet, I don't think I ever will act on my thoughts, but you never know one day I might just do that.

The whole thing is very tiring and sometimes my thoughts escape from behind my cheerful façade which disturbs me even more because my family and colleagues then have to put up with me being in a dark place, which in turn makes me feel guilty and the cycle gets worse.

The only thing that keeps me alive is that there is always tomorrow, there's always a new day and I live in eternal hope that one day I'll be free from this type of thinking.



TALKING ABOUT YOUR SUICIDAL FEELINGS

Talking really does help. It won't necessarily take away your thoughts or change how you're feeling but it can make it that little bit easier to cope with. Who you talk to is your choice. If you decide to talk about how you're feeling, but don't know who to talk to, the options listed below might help:

SAMARITANS

Samaritans volunteers listen in confidence to anyone in any type of emotional distress, without judging or telling people what to do.

The Samaritans don't offer advice, but they encourage people who contact them to talk about their feelings and help them explore all the options they have. They believe that given the time and space to work problems or difficulties through in confidence, people can find an inner strength and perspective which lets them find their own way forward.

Samaritans won't ever tell anyone about your conversation, or even that you called, unless you ask them to. Please note that Samaritans will never call emergency services except in the following circumstances:

- a) You ask them to and are unable to call yourself.
- b) You have already told them your address, location or phone number and then become incoherent or unresponsive during the call.
- c) You are in a local branch and have harmed yourself in a way that puts you in danger.

If you tell Samaritans you want an ambulance, they'll encourage you to call one yourself as this is the quickest way for you to get help. If you'd still like them to do this for you, they will.

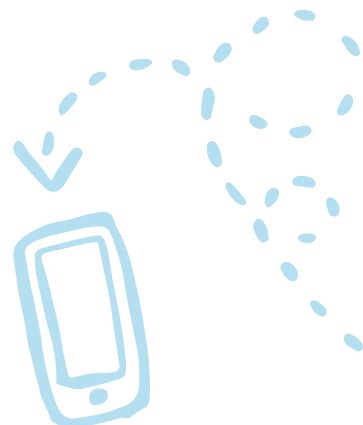
You can call the Samaritans on 116 123

The Samaritans also offer an email service if you'd prefer to write down how you're feeling:

jo@samaritans.org

Or visit the website:

www.samaritans.org



BREATHING SPACE

Breathing Space is a free, confidential phone and web-based service for people in Scotland experiencing low mood, depression or anxiety. They are there in times of difficulty to provide a safe and supportive space by listening, offering advice and information.

You can call Breathing Space on 0800 83 85 87 at the following times: Monday-Thursday 6pm-2am, Friday-Monday 6pm-6am. Or visit the website www.breathingspace.scot

GP / DOCTOR

Your doctor can refer you to different services that may help. This might include referring you to a counsellor or a member of the Community Mental Health Team. If you think you'll want extra time for this conversation try to make a double appointment.

SOMEBODY YOU KNOW

Telling somebody you know, and trust, can be very helpful. This means there's somebody in your life that you can turn to and gain support from. Somebody that you know and trust may include your partner, a friend, a work colleague or a minister/faith leader.

ORGANISATIONS PROVIDING SUPPORT IN YOUR AREA

There may be local organisations near you that can provide you with support, either with your feelings of suicide or with possible other issues that may be causing you pain and difficulty (debt, relationship problems, alcohol, etc.). The services available vary from area to area and it can be difficult to know what is available to you.

SAMH works to collect information on local services across Scotland. To find out more about services in your area, call the SAMH Information Service on 0344 800 0550 or email info@samh.org.uk.

This service is available Monday - Friday, 9am - 6pm, except on Bank Holidays.

TELLING PEOPLE HOW YOU FEEL

Telling someone close to you that you're thinking about suicide can be scary and stressful, and you may choose not to do this. However, if you decide you do want to confide in somebody you might want to think about the following:

Timing

Ideally you want to speak to somebody when they'll have the time to sit and listen properly to what you're telling them. What you have to say is important. However, sometimes it can be difficult to find this time naturally: rather than waiting for a long time you might want to consider asking for a quiet time to talk.

Place

If you decide to speak to somebody ideally you want to do it in a place that is private and peaceful. You don't want to be interrupted or disturbed.

Finding the words

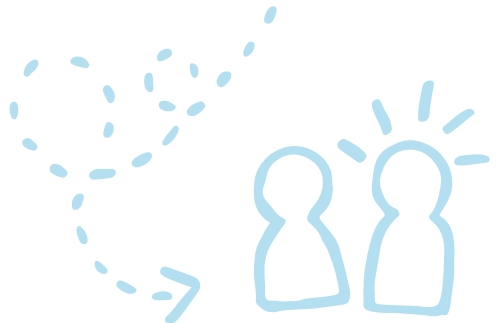
We all get tongue-tied, especially when we're feeling stressed and anxious. You might find it helpful to write down how you're feeling and then read your words out to the person you're speaking to.

Their reaction

You may have to prepare yourself for getting a very emotional reaction. The person you tell may be hurt, confused and angry. Equally they may surprise you and be completely supportive and understanding. If their first reaction isn't what you would hope for, give them time, remember suicide is a scary thought and their reaction will come from their fear for you.

You're not alone

You may feel like the only person who feels suicidal, but that is not the case. Throughout this booklet we've included quotes from people who have experienced thoughts of suicide, and in some instances they still do. The quotes are taken from their stories that they bravely shared with us. We've included their stories so you can read them in full.





Maureen's story

I was always a quiet girl. Aged 12, I started to feel very 'different' from my peers. I suppose I began self-harming as a way of expressing my inner confusion. I retreated into books... and my own company. I first attempted suicide when I was 13. When I think back on it, I wonder where those acute feelings came from at such a young age.

I was referred to a child psychiatrist, and after one session begged not to go back. I felt patronised and grossly misunderstood. When I returned to school after the summer break, the 'incident' was never mentioned. Not one teacher spoke to me about it. So, I muddled through on the periphery of my peer group, taking refuge in books and the rural environment I lived in. All throughout my teenage years and beyond, I self-harmed through cutting. I was always careful not to show my scars, and to keep this a private thing. I found comfort in having this secret, that was purely mine, and that only I had control over.

When I was 17, I attempted suicide again. I was discharged from hospital after 2 days, with no follow-up care. I felt wretched. I was sad to still be alive, but tremendously guilty and embarrassed at what I had done, and what I was putting my family through.

My depression comes in cycles. I can be fine for months, and have at times been lulled into a false sense of security. I'll sink into a depressive cycle, usually isolating myself, self-harming and having frequent suicidal thoughts. I feel that my suicide attempts have been a 'cry of pain' – an expression of the internal anguish I was feeling.

Aged 18, I moved to Glasgow and left all the old associations behind. No-one knew me here, and I was no longer 'the weird girl who tried to kill herself.' Despite making lots of friends and doing great academically, I continued to self-harm sporadically. At 24, I broke up with someone I loved. I was having frequent suicidal thoughts and could barely leave the house or speak to anyone. I finally plucked up the courage to go to my GP and ask for help. I was diagnosed with clinical depression that very day. I went home in a state of shock. A lot of people say that getting a diagnosis is a relief to them, but for me it was horrifying. I would be stuck with this accursed illness my whole life. It was integral to me and I had no control over it.

That was the final straw for me, and that night I tried to take my life for the third time. This time I was offered on-going support, and after 3 days in hospital, I returned home and began to learn about depression and how to live with it... not fight against it. This has involved medication and talking therapies, and is an on-going process!

I now see my depression as an integral part of me. My experiences of suicide have been intensely distressing, but they have also shaped who I am and highlighted the crucial importance of talking about it. Distress and anguish does pass, and I am glad I am still here today. I know I will feel suicidal again in the future, but I now know how to get through these times. I am in a lifelong relationship with depression and have finally accepted it... maybe even embraced it!

HELP DIRECTORY



For when you need urgent help

Think in advance about what you could do to get emergency help if your thoughts of suicide become too much and you think you are close to trying to take your life.

THE GP OR COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH NURSE

Contact number

Write your contact details here

Opening hours

Most GP surgeries have standard office opening times, e.g. 9am-5pm. Outside these hours, you can contact NHS 24 for medical attention.

If you have a Community Mental Health Nurse or a contact at your local mental health team, ask them what number to call for emergencies during the day and at night.

How they can help

Your GP or Community Mental Health Nurse (CMHN) can talk to you about how you are feeling and arrange treatment and support for you. They'll also accept calls on an emergency basis from carers. If you are calling your GP or CMHN you should explain clearly that you are suicidal and describe to them how bad it is so they can help.

NHS 24

 Telephone 111

Opening hours

24 hours a day

How they can help

When you call NHS 24 you'll be asked to outline the situation and a discussion will be arranged with a nurse adviser.

You should call NHS 24 outside of normal GP surgery hours for medical advice and attention. They will also accept calls on an emergency basis from carers.

Is This For Emergencies? Yes

EMERGENCY SERVICES

 Telephone 999

Opening hours

24 hours a day

How they can help

When you call up emergency services, try to stay calm and describe to the adviser what is going on. Emergency services can arrange to send an ambulance if one is needed. An alternative would be to visit your local hospital A&E department if you're able to get there.

Is This For Emergencies? Yes



For when you need to talk to someone

Remember that if you don't have trusted people around you in your life to talk to right now, there are telephone numbers you can call for help and support. A stranger can listen to you in a way that a family member might find difficult. However, family and friends can be lifesavers so try if you can to stay connected with people close to you.

A TRUSTED PERSON

Contact number

Write your contact details here

Try to explain to someone you know and trust what it's like for you on a day-to-day basis.

Once you've shared this, you can go back to them when you next need to talk.

Check with them if they mind you calling them late at night or through the day.

How they can help

People you trust can help keep you grounded when things are most challenging with the person you are supporting.

Choose your trusted people carefully. Everyone is different, and while some people may listen, support and help you de-stress, others may add to your stress with views and opinions of their own.

BREATHING SPACE

 0800 83 85 87

Opening hours

Monday-Thursday, 6pm-2am
and from 6pm on Friday through
until 6am on Monday

How they can help

Breathing Space is a free, confidential phone and web-based service for people in Scotland experiencing low mood, depression or anxiety. They are there in times of difficulty to provide a safe and supportive space by listening, offering advice and information.

SAMARITANS

 116 123

 Jo@samaritans.org

Opening hours

24 hours a day

How they can help

Samaritans volunteers listen in confidence to anyone in any type of emotional distress, without judging or telling people what to do. They don't offer advice, but they encourage people who contact them to talk about their feelings and help them explore all the options they have.

Help for how you are feeling

LIVING LIFE

 0800 328 9655
 www.nhs24.scot/our-services/living-life

Opening hours

Monday-Friday 1pm-9pm

How they can help


Living Life is an NHS service providing support over the telephone based on the Cognitive Behavioural Therapy model.

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, or CBT, is a way of talking about how you think about yourself, the world and other people and how what you do affects your thoughts and feelings. CBT can help you to change how you think ('cognitive') and what you do ('behaviour'). These changes can help you to feel and cope better.

Unlike some of the other talking therapies, it focuses on the 'here and now' problems and difficulties. Instead of focusing on the causes of your distress or symptoms in the past it looks for ways to improve your state of mind now.

Depending on your area, you can either access 'guided self-help' or more in-depth telephone counselling.

NHS INFORM

 www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/mental-health

How they can help

NHS Inform offer range of free online self-help guides you can download.

MOODGYM

 www.moodgym.com.au

How they can help

An online self-help resource based on Cognitive Behavioural Therapy.

DISTRESS BRIEF INTERVENTIONS

 01698 366988
or complete online form at
 www.dbi.scot

How they can help

Distress Brief Interventions offers connected compassionate support for people experiencing distress in Scotland.

CLEAR YOUR HEAD

 www.clearyourhead.scot

How they can help

Clear Your Head offers online mental health support information and ideas for you and others.

NATIONAL WELLBEING HUB

 0800 111 4191

 www.promis.scot

How they can help

The site acts as a hub which gathers help and resources for carers and people working in health and social care.

SHOUT 85258

 Text 'SHOUT' to 85258

How they can help

Shout 85258 is a free, confidential 24/7 text messaging mental health support service for anyone who's struggling to cope.

UNITED TO PREVENT SUICIDE

 unitedtopreventsuicide.org.uk



How they can help

United to Prevent Suicide is a social movement of people from all across Scotland who share the belief that each and every one of us has a role to play in preventing suicide. The website is a hub for the community and is filled with resources and links.

Advice

Sometimes you may need specific advice about one single issue like relationships, alcohol, drugs, etc. Below are some organisations that you might find helpful:

THE SPARK – RELATIONSHIP COUNSELLING AND SUPPORT

 0808 802 2088
 www.thespark.org.uk

Opening hours

Monday-Thursday 9am-9pm,
Friday 9am-4pm

How they can help

Support specialising in couple counselling, marriage counselling, youth counselling and family counselling.



MONEY ADVICE SCOTLAND

 www.moneyadvicescotland.org.uk

How they can help

Free, confidential, impartial and independent debt advice and financial inclusion.

KNOW THE SCORE

 0800 587 5879
 www.knowthescore.info




Opening hours

Monday-Friday 9am-9pm, Saturday-Sunday 10am-4pm

How they can help

Speak to someone confidentially about tackling drug dependency and addiction.

ALCOHOL FOCUS SCOTLAND

 0141 572 6700 (info),
 0800 7 314314 (counselling)
 www.alcohol-focus-scotland.org.uk

How they can help

Alcohol Focus Scotland is the national charity working to prevent and reduce alcohol harm.

CRUSE BEREAVEMENT CARE

 0808 802 616
 www.crusescotland.org.uk

How they can help

Cruse provide help with bereavement through one-to-one counselling sessions which will enable you to work through your grief. Or it may be that you need reassurance that others have been through the same anguish and despair and would like to read some reassuring stories or get some advice.

TRAUMA COUNSELLING LINE SCOTLAND

 08088 02 04 06
 counselling@health-in-mind.org.uk



Opening hours

Daytime and evening appointments available

How they can help

Confidential telephone counselling service for adult survivors of childhood abuse.

SHELTER SCOTLAND

 0808 800 4444
 www.scotland.shelter.org.uk

Opening hours

Monday-Friday 9am-5pm

How they can help

Shelter provides housing advice; whether it's about being homeless, facing homelessness, bad housing or debt. Advice is available via the helpline or online.



SAMH is Scotland's mental health charity and is dedicated to mental health and wellbeing for all. We are here to provide help, information and support to people affected by mental health problems.

[samh.org.uk](https://www.samh.org.uk)

 **[@samhtweets](https://twitter.com/samhtweets)**

 **facebook.com/SAMHmentalhealth**

 **[@samhscotland](https://www.instagram.com/samhscotland)**

 **0344 800 0550**

 **info@samh.org.uk**