

# GUIDELINES FOR TALKING in Crisis Situations

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If you suspect that you may be talking to someone who is in crisis, it can be downright terrifying. What questions do you ask? What can you do?

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## TAKE A DEEP BREATH

Start by centering yourself. These conversations can be scary but a suicidal person doesn't actually want to die, they feel hopeless that things will ever get better. **The fact that they are alive shows that part of them still wants to live, and the fact that they are opening up to you is a good sign.**

02

## TAKE TIME TO LISTEN

As a rule of thumb, allow the other person to do the most talking. This is not the time for you to insert your own stories, experiences, and advice, and it certainly is not the time for platitudes and clichés such as “you can't have a rainbow without a little rain.” Take time to really listen to what is being said. Ask open-ended questions that encourage the conversation to keep flowing.

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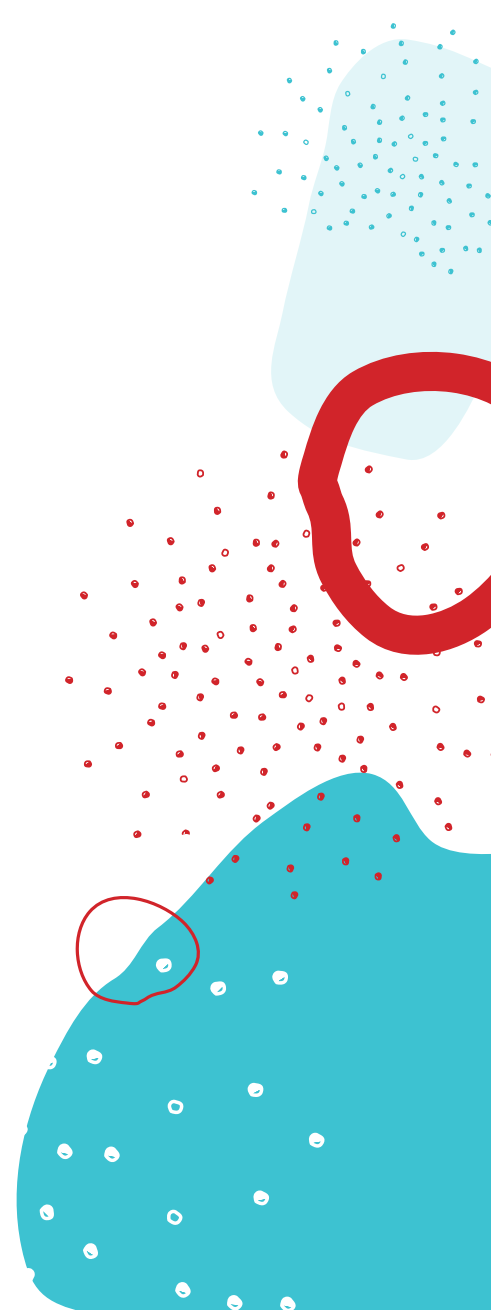
## RESPECT THE SITUATION

Don't try to tell someone how they should feel. Even if they are not suicidal or “in crisis”, their situation and feelings are still real and valid. Don't try to talk someone out of their fear, anger, or shock. **Don't interrogate or force them to answer questions they don't want to answer. Don't interrupt them or talk over them. Be present with them in the moment.**

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## ALLOW FOR EXPRESSION

Don't try to stop someone from expressing their emotions, such as crying. These expressions can be a therapeutic release for what they're feeling inside. Sometimes an intense expression needs to happen and then the individual can continue after the moment has passed.



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## ALLOW FOR SILENCE

People don't always have a reason for why they feel the way they do, or they may have difficulty finding the right words to express their thoughts. Silence allows someone the time to think and reflect.

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## BE COMFORTING

The best thing you can do is express genuine concern and empathy for the person. Acknowledge what they are going through, how you feel about it, and that they are not alone and are in a safe place. Offer items of comfort such as a beverage, blanket, food, or physical expressions such as a hug or holding hands if they are open to it.

I care about you, so I'm really glad you decided to open up to me about this.

I love you and I want you to feel safe, so please know that I am a safe person to talk to. I am here for you.

I am so glad to have you in my life and I would be devastated if anything happened to you. Whatever happens, I am here for you, you don't have to walk through this alone.

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## BE AWARE OF NONVERBALS

Nonverbal cues can give you clues about how someone is feeling. Checking a watch and eyeing a door/exit could indicate a desire to leave, toe-tapping or fidgeting hands could indicate anxiety or nervousness, a stiffened posture could indicate you have crossed into their personal space. **Be aware of these signs but don't make assumptions - especially if the individual is from a different cultural background than you.**

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## PROVIDE INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

When someone is hurting or in crisis, oftentimes they are unable to focus on getting help or researching where to go. Offer to help find resources or agencies that can help, offer to make phone calls for additional information, or to help set up an appointment.

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## ASK FOR HELP

You as the helper are not alone, either. If you're worried about someone, do not tackle it alone. Reach out to a parent, additional friends, or call a local crisis line. **If you're unsure how to move forward, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255 or send a text message to 741-741.** It's completely anonymous and a trained crisis counselor can help give you guidance on how to help your friend. ■