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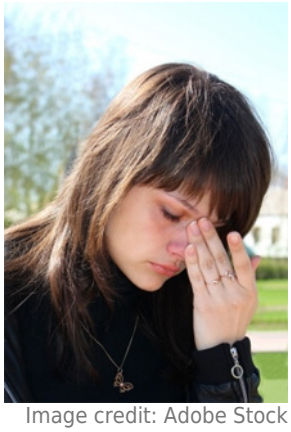
Coping with Thoughts of Suicide: Youth Edition



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Summary: The bad news, is that when overwhelmed, sometimes people turn to thoughts of suicide as a way of coping. The good news, is that there are always alternatives and ways to cope.

Three key things to remember:

1. Suicide is permanent, while our pain and struggles are temporary.
2. Help is out there, and it is only a text or a phone call away...
3. You are not alone!

Many youth will have thoughts of suicide. These thoughts can range from simply wishing for the pain to end, all the way to taking steps to seriously harming themselves. People who have thoughts of suicide often struggle with distress for a long time. They consider death as one option for stopping their pain. Others might have a sudden urge when they live a moment they find difficult to accept.

When we asked youth about suicide:

Guys told us...

- 1 out of every 7 or 8 guys said they had thoughts of suicide in the past;
- About 1 in every 15 guys said they had current thoughts of suicide;
- about 1 in every 14 guys said they had attempted suicide (YouthNet Ottawa, 2010)

Girls told us us...

- Close to 1 out of 3 girls said they had thoughts of suicide in the in the past;
- 1 out of every 7 or 8 girls said they had current thoughts of suicide;
- A little more than 1 in 6 girls said they had attempted suicide (YouthNet, 2010)

Although young women are twice as likely as young men to attempt suicide, young men are 3 times as likely to die because of suicide. This is scary stuff, and needs to change.

7 Ways to manage thoughts of suicide

There are many things you can do to handle these thoughts. It might be hard to imagine now, but things really can get better.

1. Breathe

This first step is often underestimated but very important. If you are having thoughts of suicide, slow down what you are doing and thinking by taking slow, deep breaths.

2. Reach out

There are many ways others can support you. Telling a family member or friend what you are going through can help relieve some pressure. Knowing what type of help to ask for will make things easier. Think about people in your life who can:

- Just spend time with you, to help distract you and keep you busy (like just hanging out, going to a movie or for a walk).
- Help out with practical things like meals, laundry or going with you to the doctor.
- Listen as you share your feelings and give you emotional support.

What makes a good listener?

- Good listeners listen to your feelings without judging, criticizing, or giving unwanted advice. Don’t be afraid to tell a parent, family member or friend the best way to support you.
- You might say:
    - “Can we talk? I’m going through a really tough time..."
    - "For now, I just need tyou to listen... I don't need advice. I'll let you know if I do... Right now, I just want someone that I can talk to..."
    - "I might get sad and cry... You don't have to do anything... Just listen, hold me, etc."
    - "Just accept me without judging me... No one's been through exactly what I've been through..."

Think about people in your life who can support you...

- Someone to spend time with to take my mind off things _____
- Someone who can help with practical things _____
- Someone who is a good listener _____

If speaking with someone face to face is hard, you could try:

- Writing a note
- E-mail
- Instant messaging
- Texting

3. Get help

If you have a hard time sharing your thoughts with someone you know, think about others with experience helping people with thoughts of suicide, like:

- Your family doctor;
- Walk-in clinics;
- Telephone support lines;
- Websites that offer online support (see the resource section for more detailed information).

4. Stay Safe

If thoughts and urges about suicide grow stronger, you can keep yourself safe by:

- Surrounding yourself with people you care about;
- Asking others to remove anything that could be harmful, or might tempt you in a difficult moment;
- Not using drugs or alcohol;
- Taking medications only as presecribed by your doctor;
- Calling a crisis line. They can give you non-judgemental support, and help you make a safety plan if you have difficulty staying safe (see the Emergency Action Plan on page 4 for phone numbers).

5. Distract yourself

When urges or thoughts appear, use distractions to help you live through the moment. These can be activities that allow you to change your thoughts, emotions and current behaviours. Make a list of the ones you like best and that help you focus all of your attention. Try one of these activities for least 30 minutes.

- Relax: Take a bath or a shower, meditate, take a nap, get a massage, practice yoga or a mindfulness exercise. o Physical exercise: Anything that gets you moving like walking, running, dancing, cycling, rollerblading, swimming. Being outside is even better.
- Mental exercise: Read, watch a movie, do a puzzle or crossword, build something, bake something.
- Connect with others: Talk to someone, hang out with someone, go online or just go out in crowds.

How else can you distract yourself when you're struggling?

_____

6. Soothe yourself

Soothe yourself by doing things that make your senses happy.

- Sound: Listen to music you enjoy, or a CD of relaxing sounds, a podcast, or focus on complete silence.
- Sight: Watch a "feel good" movie or TV show, read a book, find inspirational pictures online or old pictures that make you happy, look at art you enjoy.
- Taste: Eat one of your favorite foods, chew gum, enjoy a lollipop, drink tea or hot chocolate,or enjoy melting chocolate in your mouth.
- Smell: Surround yourself with nice smells, like a favorite perfume, incense, or just the outdoors.
- Touch: Make yourself comfortable in your favorite PJs, hold on to your favorite stuffed animal (or real one), take a warm bath or a cool shower.

7. Build your Life

You may be in a rough place right now, but it really is possible to build a life you really want to live. But you need to take this one step at a time.

Ask yourself some questions first:

- What's important to you?
- What would you hate to lose?
- What would you like more of in your life? Less of?

Pick something you'd like to have, develop or improve (a goal). Get support to help you reach your goal, and talk about the steps you need to take to get where you'd like to be. Some examples:

- Relationships: You can work on repairing them, reach out for new ones or end destructive ones. Invest in your relationship with yourself by taking care of your body and challenging negative self talk.
- Activities or hobbies: Activities or hobbies that make you feel good and bring positive experiences. This might mean spending time on activities you're already involved in. Or it might mean trying something new, joining a club or volunteering with a group (a great way to meet new people and make friends).
- Religion, faith and spirituality: Whatever our beliefs, exploring our faith or spirituality can help us find meaning and purpose in our lives.
- Take care of your body: Getting enough sleep and proper nutrition will help you handle everyday struggles better. Sleep can sometimes be difficult, but try to get into a routine that gives you at least 8-10 hours of sleep each night.

Emergency Action Plan

Making an emergency action plan ahead of time is helpful and will reduce stress if it is ever needed. The middle of a crisis is not the best time to be running around trying to find information or phone numbers. Add these names

and numbers to your mobile phone contacts.

Names and Numbers for my health care professionals

Doctor: .....

Counsellor/therapist: .....

Others: .....

My hospital (name and phone number):

.....
My medications, including dosages:

.....
My pharmacy and phone number:

.....

People I can call for support

.....

Looking for help?

Kids Help Phone

- 1.800.668.6868
  Telephone support line available 24/7/365 across Canada.
- http://www.kidshelpphone.ca
  Live chat available through the website

Authors

Reviewed by the Mental Health Information Committee at the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario (CHEO). Thanks to YouthNet's Youth Advisory Committee (YAC-CHEO) for reviewing and providing feedback to this fact sheet!

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