



Mental Health  
Commission  
of Canada

Commission de  
la santé mentale  
du Canada



# Suicide Prevention in the Workplace





Suicide is a deeply complex and sensitive issue that affects individuals, families, workplaces, and communities. In the workplace, it can feel overwhelming to know what to say — or how to say it — when someone may be struggling. Yet, we need to have these meaningful conversations to provide support and resources and to bring hope to someone who may be struggling with thoughts of suicide. Just *talking* about suicide is one of the best ways to prevent it.

This guide is designed for employers, managers, and employees who want to foster a culture of care and support. It offers practical tips, strategies, and resources for implementing suicide prevention in the workplace, for supporting your mental health and that of those you work with, and for approaching and navigating conversations about suicide.

The guide is organized into dedicated sections for employers, managers,

co-workers, workers who engage with customers, and workers who may be struggling themselves, and it includes a universal crisis conversation guide. Some of the sections below provide suggestions on steps to follow when you suspect an individual in your workplace might be having thoughts of suicide. Those steps are presented in the order in which the response might typically unfold, but you do not need to follow all of the steps in the order suggested in this guide.

# Crisis conversation guide

When speaking to someone (or observing their behaviours), you can take the following steps to help them get the information, resources, and support they need.

If you are working with someone who has indicated or shown signs that they are thinking about suicide, there are several things you can do:

- Have an open conversation about their feelings and what you have noticed about their behaviour. Listen without judgment.
  - "It sounds like things have been really tough lately. Do you want to talk about it?"
  - "I'm worried because I noticed x. How can I help?"
- Ask the person if they are having thoughts of self-harm or suicide. Asking a person directly does not heighten their risk of suicide or put the thought into their mind. Instead, it provides an opportunity to have an open conversation.
  - "Are you thinking of suicide?"
  - "Have you had thoughts about suicide?"
- Provide the space for them to talk about their struggles. Validate their feelings and be non-judgmental. Take them seriously. Thank them for opening up and trusting you with how they are feeling.

- If they do not want to talk with you, ask if there is someone else they'd feel more comfortable talking to, such as a trusted loved one, someone in human resources, a mental health professional, or a crisis line like [9-8-8](#).
- Connect them with professional support. Share relevant resources and supports, including employee assistance programs and employee benefits (if applicable) or community supports, such as [9-8-8](#).
- Call 911 if they are in immediate danger or have already taken steps toward suicide.

## To learn more about how to talk to someone thinking of suicide:

- [How do I talk to someone thinking about suicide, a 9-minute video](#)
- [How to Ask Someone If They Are Thinking About Suicide](#)
- [HelpGuide: Suicide Prevention](#)
- [Talking about Suicide with Someone](#)



**SCAN HERE**  
for the full guide

[mentalhealthcommission.ca/resource/suicide-prevention-in-the-workplace](https://mentalhealthcommission.ca/resource/suicide-prevention-in-the-workplace)



# Tips for employers

## Proclaim suicide prevention a priority

- Ensure employees have health coverage for mental health counselling and access to an employee assistance program that is equipped to have conversations with those thinking about suicide.
- Make suicide prevention training (e.g., [ASIST](#), [Mental Health First Aid](#)) available to all employees in your workplace. Ensure at least one member of your human resources team or joint health and safety team has taken suicide prevention training and is equipped and prepared to offer support during a crisis until the employee can be connected to a mental health care provider.
- Offer mental health anti-stigma training like [The Working Mind](#) and [Reducing Mental Health Stigma in the Workplace](#).
- Incorporate suicide prevention into your mental health and/or health and safety strategies (e.g., critical incident stress debriefing and/or counselling services after a stressful workplace incident, providing flexibility for counselling or other appointments).
- Frequently promote emergency resources like crisis lines, employee benefits, employee assistance programs, and community resources (e.g., [9-8-8 posters](#)). Ensure your human resources team or management team has created a list of resources that can be provided to employees if mental health or suicide becomes a concern.

- Provide access to (physical or virtual) safe spaces where workers and/or managers can talk confidentially and without judgment about how they are feeling, including about their mental health struggles or suicidal thoughts.
- Participate in mental health awareness days and incorporate concrete action (e.g., [suggestions for National Suicide Prevention Month by Workplace Suicide Prevention](#)).
  - September: Suicide Prevention Month
  - September 10: World Suicide Prevention Day
  - October 10: World Mental Health Day

## Identify and recognize social dynamics and workplace factors that can affect mental health<sup>1</sup>

- Harassment, bullying, and the use of stigmatizing language at work increase the risk of suicide. Be prepared to name and respond to these realities. Use the [National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace's](#) framework to assess workplace stressors that may contribute to suicidal ideation. For more information about stigmatizing language, see [Language Matters](#) by the Public Health Agency of Canada.
- Be aware that financial concerns and the risk of job loss or other sources of stress, fear, and uncertainty can result in thoughts of suicide.
- Ensure tough conversations, including those related to terminations and organizational changes, are done in a psychologically safe way. See [Termination and layoff planning](#) for suggestions to minimize the risk of harm.

<sup>1</sup> See the [National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace](#) to learn more about workplace factors that can affect mental health.

- Reinforce protective factors in the workplace to promote a positive working environment, which in turn can improve mental health, such as creating a caring work environment, providing access to psychosocial support, increasing recognition at work, and ensuring that your organization has a healthy conflict management policy.

### Respond swiftly after a suicide loss

- Communicate with care and compassion.
- Refer to suicide postvention protocols or human resource policies, if applicable. Seek advice from your human resources team or employee assistance program (if applicable) as needed.
- Notify employees of the death of the employee.
- Protect and respect the privacy of the deceased and their loved ones. The cause of death (i.e., suicide) should not be shared without talking to their loved ones.
- Connect affected employees to relevant information, resources, and support, such as an employee assistance program or employee benefits, if applicable, their human resources team, or community resources, such as [9-8-8](#).
- Remember that not all employees respond to loss — especially traumatic loss — in the same way. Providing different supports is key to helping as many employees as possible.
- If the family of a deceased employee has agreed to provide information about a funeral or donations, be sure to communicate the information to employees. If the family has chosen a private service, communicate those wishes as well, so employees are not left wondering.
- For more information about responding to an employee suicide, refer to the resources in the section below on [Supporting employees after a suicide](#).

# Resources for employers

## Crisis support

If you or a colleague is currently in crisis, call or text 988.

- [9-8-8: Suicide Crisis Helpline](#) available 24/7
- [What to expect when you call or text 9-8-8](#)

If you or a colleague has already taken steps toward suicide, call 911.

## Training

[Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training \(ASIST\)](#)

[safeTALK](#)

[Start](#)

[Mental Health First Aid](#)

[The Working Mind](#)

[Reducing Mental Health Stigma in the Workplace](#)

[Workplace Peer Support](#)

## **Organizational approaches**

[Workplace Mental Health](#)

[National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace](#)

[Workplace Suicide Prevention](#)

[Workplace Suicide Prevention, Mental Health Promotion & Worker Well-Being: Program and Strategy Development Quick Start Guide](#)

[Responding to suicide risk in the workplace: A guide for people professionals](#)

[Postvention Program: Being prepared to act in the event of a suicide](#)

[Supporting mental health at work: Practical guidance](#)

[Suicide Prevention: Organizational Approaches](#)

[Working on my Well-Being initiative](#)

[Workplace suicide prevention toolkit](#)

[Santé mentale et travail](#)  
*(available only in French)*

[Gestionnaires face aux enjeux de santé mentale](#)  
*(available only in French)*

[Guidebook on Training Programs](#)

[Checklist: On Suicide – Before You Post or Publish](#)

## **Supporting employees after a suicide**

[After a Suicide: Postvention Toolkit for Workplaces](#)

[Suicide Postvention in the Workplace: Supporting Organisations and Employees](#)

[Leading a Company in the Aftermath of a Suicide Loss](#)

[Responding to suicide risk in the workplace: A guide for people professionals – Support after suicide](#)





# Tips for managers

## Understand the role you play in preventing suicide

- Notice if any members of your team exhibit a change in behaviour, have talked about suicide, or have expressed a deterioration in their mental health, such as feelings of increased stress or anxiety.
- Approach them with compassion and ask questions. Since we don't know what a person may be going through, kindness and genuine support should be our default response. Remember, there is always a reason for a change in behaviour. Don't assume you know why.
- Check in regularly, and proactively remind the employee of the information, support, and resources available to them, such as employee benefits and employee assistance programs (if applicable) or community resources, including [9-8-8](#).
- Create a safe space and open environment that normalizes conversations about mental health and mental health struggles.
- Reinforce protective factors in the workplace to promote a positive working environment, which in turn can improve mental health, such as creating a caring work environment, providing access to psychosocial support, and increasing recognition at work.
- Be flexible in providing time for counselling or other appointments.
- Seek advice from your human resources team or employee assistance program (if applicable) if you are unsure how to best support your team.

## Support team members at risk by asking: "Are you thinking of suicide?"

- If you're concerned, ask your team member directly if they are having thoughts of suicide.
- Asking about suicide does not heighten their risk of suicide or plant the idea in their mind. Instead, it provides an opportunity to have an open conversation.
- When asking a person directly if they are having thoughts of suicide, you can also explain why you are asking, such as noticing behaviour changes or increased absences.
- Be empathetic and non-judgmental. Thank the employee for trusting you and sharing their experiences.
- Connect them with relevant resources and support, including employee assistance programs and employee benefits (if applicable), human resources, or community supports, such as [9-8-8](#).
- For more information, refer to the [crisis conversation guide](#) above.
- Work with the employee to develop a check-in plan and ask what you can do to support them.
- If the employee needs accommodations or time off, work with human resources to come up with a plan together.
- Maintain confidentiality as much as possible but acknowledge limitations. If you believe someone is at risk of harming themselves or others, you should seek additional support. Refer to any applicable mental health or human resources policies for more information, or contact your human resources or management teams for guidance and support.

## Support team members after the suicide loss of a colleague or a loved one

- Approach your team with care and compassion.
- Be available, flexible, and aware. Employees may experience shock and grief, which can affect their ability to focus. They may also need time to process or grieve and need flexibility in their schedule. Keep in mind that people have different ways of grieving, and their needs may differ.
- Refer to suicide postvention protocols or human resources policies, if appropriate. Seek advice from your human resources team or employee assistance program (if applicable) as needed.
- Protect and respect the privacy of the deceased and their loved ones. The cause of death (i.e., suicide) should not be shared without talking to their loved ones.
- Check in regularly but understand your own limits when providing support. This is key to ensuring your mental health and well-being, as well as the mental health and well-being of the person you are trying to support. Know your limits and find others who are equipped to provide more support when needed.
- Connect employees to relevant information, resources, and support, such as an employee assistance program and employee benefits (if applicable) or community support, such as [9-8-8](#).
- If the family of a deceased employee has agreed to provide information about a funeral or donations, be sure to communicate the information to employees. If the family has chosen a private service, communicate those wishes as well, so employees are not left wondering.

## Take care of yourself

- Pay attention to how you are doing. Set appropriate boundaries and seek support when needed.
- Give yourself time and be aware of the effects of grief and loss on your mental and physical health.
- Take the pulse of your feelings and behaviours, and know when to seek help. Online tools such as the [Mental Health Continuum Self-Check](#) can be helpful.
- Adopt healthy coping strategies. For example, stay connected with others, exercise (even a short walk counts), rest when you need to, pick up a new hobby or creative outlet, connect with others through shared activities, and pursue daily activities that bring you joy.
- If you need further support, reach out to your employee assistance program (if applicable), family doctor, or other community supports, such as [9-8-8](#).

# Resources for managers

## Crisis support

If you or a colleague is currently in crisis, call or text 988.

- [9-8-8: Suicide Crisis Helpline](#) available 24/7
- [What to expect when you call or text 9-8-8](#)

If you or a colleague has already taken steps toward suicide, call 911.

## Supporting team members at risk

[Supporting mental health at work: Practical guidance](#)

[Responding to suicide risk in the workplace: A guide for people professionals](#)

[Responding to Suicide Warning Signs: A guide to help managers understand and assist employees at risk in the workplace](#)

[How to Support a Co-worker Experiencing Mental Health Issues](#)

[Gestionnaires face aux enjeux de santé mentale](#)  
(available only in French)

## Following the suicide loss or attempt of an employee or their loved one

[Suicide response for leaders](#)

[Supporting employees returning to work after a mental health crisis, traumatic event, or suicide attempt: A guide for managers](#)

[Manager's Guide to Suicide Postvention in the Workplace](#)

[Suicide Postvention in the Workplace: Supporting Organisations and Employees](#)

[Coping with the Death of a Coworker](#)

[Grief in the workplace: how to deal with the loss of a co-worker](#)

[When your co-worker has died](#)





# Tips for co-workers

## Learn how to spot co-workers who may be at risk of suicide

- Co-workers may be the first to notice a decline in a colleague's mental health.
- Notice if a co-worker exhibits a noticeable change in behaviour (e.g., missed deadlines, disengagement, severe irritability) or has expressed a deterioration in their mental health, such as feelings of increased stress or anxiety.

## Be prepared to have open conversations

- Ask your co-worker how they are feeling.
- Approach them with compassion and ask questions. Since we don't know what a person may be going through, kindness and genuine support should be our default response. Remember, there is always a reason for a change in behaviour. Don't assume you know why.
- If you're concerned, ask your co-worker directly if they are having thoughts of suicide.
- Asking about suicide does not heighten their risk of suicide or plant the idea in their mind. Instead, it provides an opportunity to have an open conversation.
- When asking a person directly if they are having thoughts of suicide, you can also explain why you are asking, such as noticing behaviour changes or increased absences.
- Be empathetic and non-judgmental. Thank your co-worker for talking with you and sharing their experiences.

- Connect them with relevant resources and support, including employee assistance programs and employee benefits (if applicable), human resources, or community supports, such as [9-8-8](#).
- For more information, refer to the [crisis conversation guide](#) above.

## Provide ongoing support after a crisis or loss

- Check in regularly with your co-worker, but understand your own limits when providing support.
- Listen with empathy, and don't be afraid to direct your co-worker to a professional.
- Invite them for lunch, a coffee, or a phone or video call, but also know when to give them some space. Ask your co-worker what type of support they need.

## Take care of yourself

- Pay attention to how you are doing. Set appropriate boundaries and seek support when needed.
- Take the pulse of your feelings and behaviours, and know when to seek help. Online tools such as the [Mental Health Continuum Self-Check](#) can be helpful.
- Adopt healthy coping strategies. For example, stay connected with others, exercise (even a short walk counts), rest when you need to, pick up a new hobby or creative outlet, connect with others through shared activities, and pursue daily activities that bring you joy.
- If you need further support, reach out to your employee assistance program (if applicable), human resources, family doctor, or other community supports, such as [9-8-8](#).

# Resources for co-workers

## Crisis support

If you or a colleague is currently in crisis, call or text 988.

- [9-8-8: Suicide Crisis Helpline](#) available 24/7
- [What to expect when you call or text 9-8-8](#)

If you or a colleague has already taken steps toward suicide, call 911.

## Supporting co-workers at risk

[The Role of Co-Workers in Preventing Suicide](#)

[How to Support a Colleague Experiencing a Mental Health Crisis](#)

[I'm Concerned About Someone](#)

[Supporting someone](#)

[How to Support a Co-worker Experiencing Mental Health Issues](#)

## Following the suicide loss or attempt of a co-worker or their loved one

[How You Can Support Those Living with Suicide Loss](#)

[Supporting someone after a suicide attempt – Mind](#)

[Supporting someone after a suicide attempt – SuicideLine Victoria](#)

[Coping with the Death of a Coworker](#)

[Grief in the workplace: how to deal with the loss of a co-worker](#)

[When your co-worker has died](#)



# Tips for workers

## Prioritize your mental health

- Recognize physical or emotional indicators such as chronic fatigue, digestive problems, and feelings of heaviness, hopelessness, despair, lack of motivation, or disconnectedness. Online tools such as the [Mental Health Continuum Self-Check](#) can help.

## Open up without fear of judgment

- Talk about how you are feeling—to someone in human resources, your manager, a co-worker you trust, or someone who's been trained in [Mental Health First Aid](#).
- Access counselling through your benefits and employee assistance program, if applicable, or community resources, such as [9-8-8](#).
- Set up a plan for regular check-ins with someone in human resources, your manager, or a trusted co-worker.

## Find hope and build resilience after a suicide attempt or loss

- Give yourself time and be aware of the effects of grief and loss on your mental and physical health.
- Take the pulse of your feelings and behaviours, and know when to seek help. Online tools such as the [Mental Health Continuum Self-Check](#) can be helpful.

- Adopt healthy coping strategies. For example, stay connected with others, exercise (even a short walk counts), rest when you need to, pick up a new hobby or creative outlet, connect with others through shared activities, and pursue daily activities that bring you joy.
- If you need further support, reach out to your employee assistance program (if applicable), human resources, family doctor, or other community supports, such as [9-8-8](#).



# Resources for workers

## Crisis support

If you or a colleague is currently in crisis, call or text 988.

- [9-8-8: Suicide Crisis Helpline](#) available 24/7
- [What to expect when you call or text 9-8-8](#)

If you or a colleague has already taken steps toward suicide, call 911.

## Resources for coping with suicidal thoughts or following a suicide attempt

[How to ask for help if you are having thoughts of suicide](#)

[How To Tell Someone You Are Thinking About Suicide](#)

[Coping with Suicidal Thoughts](#)

[How I can cope with thoughts of suicide](#)

[Coping after a suicide attempt](#)

[Toolkit for people who have been impacted by a suicide attempt](#)

[Working with poor mental health](#)

## Resources for coping following a suicide loss

[Support for People Living with Loss](#)

[I'm Grieving a Loss by Suicide](#)

[Survivors of Suicide Loss](#)

[8 ways to cope after a suicide loss](#)

[A handbook for coping with suicide grief](#)

[Suicide Support Resources](#)

[Toolkit for people who have been impacted by a suicide loss](#)

[Coping with the Death of a Coworker](#)

[Grief in the workplace: how to deal with the loss of a co-worker](#)

[When your co-worker has died](#)



# Tips for workers who engage with customers

The following tips are meant for workers who may find themselves engaging with a customer (or person outside the organization) who is communicating suicidal thoughts.

## Prepare the necessary resources before such interactions

- Familiarize yourself with your organization's protocols and policies.
- Have the [Suicide Crisis Helpline](#) number on hand: 9-8-8.

## Respond in times of distress

- If you are engaging with a customer who expresses suicidal thoughts, do not ignore or dismiss their comment.
- Respond with compassion. Do not express judgment or invalidate the person's feelings.
- If you are unable to help, seek additional support, such as from your manager or a co-worker. Make sure to not leave the customer alone or ignore their request for help.
- Ask the customer directly if they are thinking about suicide. Asking about suicide does not heighten their risk of suicide or plant the idea in their mind. Instead, it provides an opportunity to have an open conversation. See the [crisis conversation guide](#) above.

- Recognize your own limits when providing support.
  - If you are engaging with the customer in person, suggest calling a crisis line together, such as [9-8-8](#), a mental health professional, or someone they trust.
  - If you are engaging with the customer over the phone, encourage them to call [9-8-8](#) directly. In certain situations, it may be safer and more appropriate to call 9-8-8 together. Obtain the customer's consent to initiate a three-way call and to share their name and phone number with 9-8-8. Once connected with a 9-8-8 responder, identify the interaction as a warm transfer and share the customer's information. The 9-8-8 responder will direct you on when to leave the call.
  - If you or the customer is in immediate danger or they have already taken steps toward suicide, call 911.

## Debrief after crisis situations

- Follow your organization's incident reporting policy, such as debriefing with your manager or someone in human resources as soon as possible after the crisis has passed.
- Take the pulse of your feelings and behaviours, and know when to seek help. Online tools such as the [Mental Health Continuum Self-Check](#) can be helpful.
- Seek additional support as needed, such as talking with someone you trust, your employee assistance program (if applicable), human resources, or community supports, such as [9-8-8](#).

# Resources for workers who engage with customers

## Crisis support

If you, a colleague, or a customer is currently in crisis, call or text 988.

- [9-8-8: Suicide Crisis Helpline](#) available 24/7
- [What to expect when you call or text 9-8-8](#)

If you, a colleague, or a customer has already taken steps toward suicide, call 911.

## Suicide prevention resources

[Preventing suicide: When and how to help](#)

[Suicidal thoughts – How to support someone](#)

[I'm Concerned About Someone](#)

[Talking about Suicide with Someone](#)

[How To Handle Distress Calls At Work](#)





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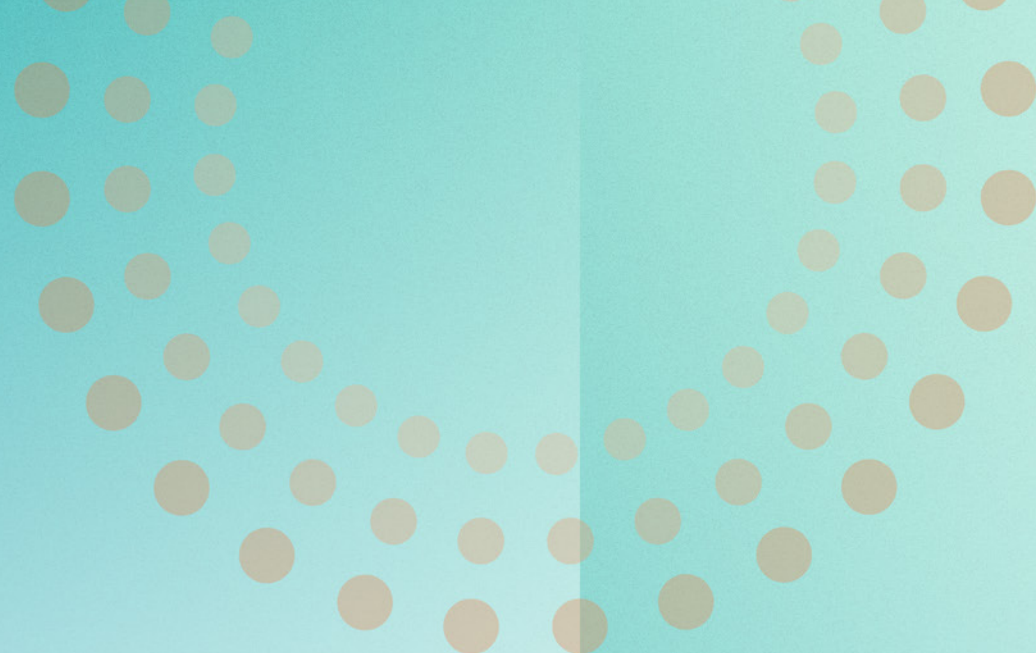
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