



Mental Health
Commission
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Workplace
Mental Health



Suicide Prevention in the Workplace





Suicide Prevention in the Workplace

Increased stress, anxiety and depression are all side-effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. For some people, this translates to feelings of hopelessness, despair, or even suicidal thoughts. We need to have meaningful conversations in the workplace about suicide, to provide support and resources, and to bring hope to someone who may be struggling with the thought of suicide.

Use this guide to navigate those difficult conversations. It offers information for your own mental health and for employers, managers, and co-workers, along with tips for those who work with the public.

Just talking about suicide is one of the best ways to prevent it.

Tips for employers

1. Proclaim suicide prevention a priority.

- Make suicide prevention training available to people in your workplace (e.g., [ASIST](#) training and/or [Mental Health First Aid](#)).
- Offer mental health anti-stigma training like [The Working Mind](#).
- Incorporate suicide prevention into your mental health strategy (e.g., critical incident stress debriefing and/or counselling services after a stressful workplace incident).
- Frequently promote emergency resources like crisis lines, employee benefits, employee assistance programs and community resources.
- Provide access to (physical or virtual) safe spaces where workers and/or managers can talk about how they are feeling with someone.

2. Identify and recognize social dynamics and workplace factors that can affect mental health.*

- Harassment, bullying, and stigmatizing language increase the risk of suicide at work – be prepared to name and respond to these realities.
- 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.

3. Respond swiftly after a suicide loss.

- Communicate with care and compassion.
- Protect the privacy of the deceased and their loved ones.
- Connect affected employees to relevant information, resources, and support.

* 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.



Resources for employers

Community support services

- [Wellness Together Canada](#)
- [Crisis Services Canada](#)
- [Canada Suicide Hotlines](#)

Training

- [Centre for Suicide Prevention](#)
- [Guidebook on Training Programs](#)
- [Mental Health First Aid](#)
- [The Working Mind](#)
- [HelpGuide: Suicide Prevention](#)

Organizational approaches

- [Workplace suicide prevention toolkit](#)
- [Suicide Prevention: Organizational Approaches](#)
- [National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace](#)

Supporting employees after a suicide

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



Tips for managers

1. Understand the role you play in preventing suicide.

- Notice if any members of your team exhibit a change in behaviour and/or have talked about suicide or expressed feelings of increased stress or anxiety.
- Check in regularly, and pro-actively remind them of the information, support, and resources that are available.
- Be flexible about the time they need for counselling or other appointments.
- Seek advice from your human resources department or employee assistance program.

2. Support team members at risk by asking: “What can I do to support you?”

- 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. It can actually be an opportunity to have an open conversation.
 - ◇ Be prepared for “yes” or “no” answers (see the [crisis conversation guide](#) section below).
 - ◇ Work with the employee to develop a check-in plan and (if needed) an accommodation plan (see [Supporting Employee Success](#) or CMHA's [accommodation guide](#)).
 - ◇ If the team member needs time off, work together to create a suitable return-to-work plan, and ask what you can do to support them.
- Always maintain confidentiality.

3. Support team members after the suicide loss of an employee or a loved one.

- Approach your team with 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 human resources policies, if appropriate.
- Provide access to information and resources, such as an employee assistance program, employee benefits, and/or community support (e.g., [Wellness Together Canada](#)) to support employees during this difficult time.
- 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.

Resources for managers

Managers and suicide prevention

[The Role of Managers in Preventing Suicide in the Workplace](#)

Supporting team members at risk

- [Supporting Someone in the Workplace at Risk of Suicide](#)
- [HelpGuide: Suicide Prevention](#)
- [Tips on talking to someone in crisis during COVID-19](#)
- [How Can I Help Someone in Mental Distress?](#)

Following the suicide loss of an employee or a loved one

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



Tips for workers

1. Prioritize your own mental health.

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

2. Open up without fear of judgment.

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

3. Finding hope and building 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 like the [Mental Health Continuum Self-Check](#) and [Check Up from the Neck Up](#) 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, and pursue daily activities that bring you joy.
- Reach out to your employee assistance program provider, family doctor, or other community supports like [Wellness Together Canada](#).



Resources for workers

Resources and webinars

- [Working Through It: Mental health awareness videos](#)
- [Wellness Together Canada](#)
- [Suicide Prevention: Building a Safety Plan](#)
- [Suicide Caregiver Support Service](#)
- [Blog: Checking In on Yourself](#)

Toolkits

[Suicide Prevention Toolkits](#)

Crisis planning

- [Crisis Services Canada](#)
24-7 Crisis number: 1-833-456-4566
TEXT: 45645 (4 p.m. to midnight ET)
- [CMHA Finding Help](#)
- [Safety Plans to Prevent Suicide](#)
- Emergency Services: 911



Tips for co-workers

1. 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.
- If a co-worker shows emotional distress or a noticeable change in behaviour (e.g., missed deadlines, disengagement, severe irritability) or has talked about suicide, ask them how they are doing.
- Approach them with compassion and ask questions. Since we don't know what a person may be going through, kindness should be our default response. Remember, there is always a reason for a change in behaviour. Don't assume you know why.

2. Be prepared to have open conversations.

- Ask your co-workers how they are feeling.
- Listen and communicate without judgment (see our [Active Listening Tip Sheet](#)).
- Encourage them to seek help.

3. 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.



Resources for co-workers

Knowing the warning signs among your co-workers

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

Having open and supportive discussions

- [Suicidal Thoughts: How to Support Someone in Crisis](#)
- [Local Resources and Support](#)

Providing ongoing support

- [Supporting Someone Returning to Work Who has Attempted Suicide](#)
- [Supporting Someone After a Suicide Loss](#)
- [Crisis Services Canada – Local Resources and Support](#)



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.

1. Prepare the necessary resources before such interactions.

- Have your employee assistance program contact information easily available. Add crisis and distress lines to your phones for quick access.
- Have the Crisis Services Canada number on hand: 1-833-456-4566.

2. Respond quickly in times of distress.

- If additional support is needed (and the person gives their permission), initiate a three-way call between yourself, the customer, and Crisis Services Canada.
- When in doubt, call 911, which does not require any confidential information.

3. Debrief after crisis situations.

Debrief with your manager, human resources, or employee assistance program representative as soon as possible after the crisis has passed.



Resources for workers who engage with customers

Suicide prevention and resources in Canada

[Preventing Suicide: Warning Signs and How to Help](#)

How to talk with customers/clients/members or others

[How to Talk to Suicidal Callers](#)

Self-Care after providing support to customers

[Suicide Prevention: Uncovering the Signs](#)





Crisis conversation guide

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



Have a conversation about their feelings and what you have observed. Explain what you have noticed about their behaviour, and have an open conversation about it.



Ask the person if they are having thoughts of self-harm or suicide. (Asking a person directly will not put the thought into their mind if they are not already thinking about it.)



Ask if they have a plan. How much thought have they put into developing a plan to harm themselves? Have they chosen a time and place? Is there a previous history of suicidal thoughts?



Help them put together a plan for safety. Stay with them and help them formulate a plan that includes appropriate resources. Ensure that they are safe and have accessed those resources before you leave them alone.



Focus on what the person can do, not what they can't do.



If you are unable to stay with them until they are in a safe place, have an alternative plan in place so they are not left alone during this difficult time. This could mean engaging a crisis line or reaching out to friends, family, and co-workers if they are comfortable lending assistance.



Call emergency services if you are unable to engage them in a safety plan and you are concerned about your conversation with them.



Learn more in [How Do I Talk to Someone Thinking of Suicide](#), a 10-minute video from the Centre for Suicide Prevention.

Help is available for you and those in your workplace.

If you are in distress, please contact your nearest distress centre:

- Website: [Crisis Services Canada](#)
- Toll-Free: 1-833-456-4566 (24-7)
- Text: 45645 (4 p.m. to midnight ET)





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Acknowledgements

This document was drafted by the Mental Health Commission of Canada in consultation with many stakeholders from various workplaces, and experts in the field of workplace mental health and suicide prevention.

We wish to thank the following people, whose contributions include reviewing and providing feedback on the development of this tip sheet:

Dr. Keith Dobson
Dr. Bill Howatt
Tara Adams
Mary Ann Baynton
Dr. Sally Spencer
Youth Council of MHCC
The Hallway Group of MHCC

Project Staff, Mental Health Commission of Canada

Liz Horvath
Tiana Field-Ridley
Nitika Riwari
Natalia Uribe
Karla Thorpe
Denise Waligora



*The views represented herein solely represent the views of the Mental Health Commission of Canada.
Production of this material is made possible through a financial contribution from Health Canada.*