

See...

Signs that may indicate a person is at risk include:¹

- Someone threatening to hurt or kill themselves, or saying they want to die – especially if they have access to means
- Someone posting about death and suicide on social media
- Someone actively searching and researching ways in which to kill themselves
- Someone talking about feeling hopeless or having no purpose
- Someone talking about being in unbearable pain or saying that they feel trapped
- Someone indicating that they feel like a burden to others or others would be better off without them
- An increase in a person's use of alcohol and drugs
- Someone acting anxious, agitated or reckless
- A change in sleeping habits; sleeping too little or too much
- Withdrawing from others or isolating oneself
- Showing rage or talking about revenge
- Displaying extreme mood swings
- Sudden euphoria.

Planning is also a serious risk factor; for example giving away possessions or making a will.

Say...

Research has shown that many community pharmacists and team members feel afraid of starting a conversation with someone who is showing 'at risk' signs. Doctors may be similarly reluctant. It is not unusual to be unsure about what to say or not say. Any connection can make someone think again about suicide, so:

- Be direct. This reduces any risk of misunderstanding
- Do not feel uncomfortable saying the word suicide. Ask the person if they feel like they want to end their life or are feeling suicidal. Using the word suicide will not put the thought into someone's head or make it more likely that they will end their life
- If they do have suicidal thoughts ask them if they have considered a method, made plans or written a note. Have they stored harmful drugs? These are clear indicators of significant intent and high risk
- Ask if they have already taken any substances (e.g. tablets)
- Ask if they are receiving any help already (e.g. from their GP)
- Discuss them contacting their formal or informal carers or offer to do this for them. If they are known to a local GP practice you can ask to speak to their GP or the duty doctor
- If the person has no one and continues to be suicidal, then call for emergency support (normally emergency services or A&E). If you think there is an imminent risk, call 999. If necessary ask for the police and request a welfare check – the police can detain the patient under the Mental Health Act. If the patient agrees to go to A&E you could call ahead and say you have serious concerns about that person's safety. Alternatively, someone could go to A&E with the patient
- Think of it as 'suicide first aid', analogous to what you would do for physical first aid in an emergency
- It is not your responsibility if someone chooses to end their life
- Suicide is a serious matter, but not one to fear.

The ZSA's online training includes short videos of possible scenarios (a co-worker, a stranger and a family member) with a 'coach', who comments on the conversations with practical tips and suggestions.