

# Let's Talk About It

Suicide Prevention,  
Intervention, and  
Community Healing:  
A Resource Guide



Chugachmiut

# GettingHelp

Chugachmiut Toll-free 24/7 Crisis  
Line

**1-844-891-0444**

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline  
**9-8-8**

Alaska Toll-free 24/7 CareLine  
**1-877-266-4357**

Alaska State Troopers & Other  
Emergencies  
**9-1-1**

A mental health crisis is considered an emergency.  
Please call the Crisis Line or 911 if you or someone  
else is in crisis.

# Seek Help Immediately

**As we try to do with this guide, keep things simple.**

Helping others is NOT something that we leave to the experts. Counselors may have more experience working with suicidal people, but everyone can help. Please keep it simple. Attend to the immediate needs. (1) If someone is bleeding or has eaten something poisonous, get them medical attention. (2) If someone is hurting and afraid, be a friend willing to talk them through the hard times. (3) Remain calm, proceed with compassion and without rushing. If you are nervous, be real and share that you don't want to lose them.

**If you or someone you know is thinking about harming themselves, please seek help immediately.**

Contact the Chugachmiut Toll-free 24/7 Crisis Line. Remember, Chugachmiut has services available to respond 24 hours a day to provide support. We provide health and risk assessments, crisis interventions, and referrals to a higher level of care or other appropriate forms of care whenever needed. Be prepared to share:

- The name of the person in distress.
- Your location and their location.
- How you communicate with the person (in-person, phone, online, etc.).
- How they are doing physically (intoxicated, poisons or drugs onboard, wounds, etc.)
- Phone numbers, if available.
- Other available resources (tribal assistance, VPSO availability, BHA/CHA presence).

## **While you are waiting for help:**

- Remain with the suicidal person and help them to stay safe until support arrives.
- Keep them talking – listen and ask questions without judging.
- Find out if they have begun a life-threatening attempt (meaning, have they already done something harmful to themselves?).
- Try to stay calm and let them know you care.
- Try to enlist a “partner in care” like a family member, elder, or other trusted person to make calls and perform background services.
- Restrict access to lethal means, such as guns, weapons, sharps, and medication.
- Please do not allow them access to alcohol as this may make more lethal other substances onboard.
- This may sound like a repeat of the first item, but DO NOT leave the person alone.

# Recognizing Signs and Symptoms

Suicidality itself can vary in longevity, cause, symptoms, and intensity. Some of the most lethal suicidal actions can come without warning and are considered “impulse” actions. Help for many mental health issues and any form of addiction should be encouraged, and many resources are available in and around our communities. Like many illnesses, prevention and early intervention can reduce the impact of mental health and addiction conditions.

Symptoms of mental illness can often be painful and bewildering, but there is help. This resource guide can be a good place to start. Tragically, mental illnesses (depression, sustained addictions, impulse disorders, obsessional disorders, etc.) are strongly associated with suicide. Mental health disorders and addiction lead to relational problems and personal agony, resulting in 90% of suicides.

Family and friends are often the first to notice warning signs of suicide in their loved ones. Recognizing these signs can be the first step towards helping at-risk individuals find the support they need. However, please note that not all suicidal individuals show signs of suicidality. If you find that someone has been suicidal, realize that the signs are sometimes not even present.

## **If you notice someone is struggling:**

- Simply be with them. It is important to let them know that you care. You don't need to have all the answers or to fix their troubles.
- Listen and don't judge. Please don't interrupt, give advice, or try to cheer them up. Acknowledge their pain and listen to them. Take them seriously and invite them to keep sharing.
- Please don't agree to keep secrets about their suicidal thoughts. You may need to tell someone else so that you can help keep them safe.
- Don't try to handle the situation alone. Seek support from professionals and from other people they trust, such as family or friends.
- Ask them if they would like to talk with you or someone else about what's going on. They may not open up immediately but letting them know you are there can be a big help. Don't pressure them to talk to you; they might feel more comfortable talking to someone else.
- Make their environment safer.
  - Get them to stick around with you.
  - Remove firearms.
  - Restrict access to lethal drugs or poisons.
  - Remove alcohol, over-the-counter pills, and medication that has not been prescribed to them.
  - Conversely, if they need their regular medications and antidepressants, help them maintain regular life rhythms.

### **If you think someone is at risk:**

- Ask them directly about their thoughts of suicide. Asking about suicide will NOT “put the thoughts in their head” ever.
- Ask them if they’ve felt this way before and what they did to cope or get through it. They might already know what (or who) could help them.
- Ask what they are planning. If they have a specific plan and the means to carry it out, they need help right away.

### **You can also ask questions such as:**

- How have you been feeling? Have you felt sad more days than not in recent weeks?
- What has changed that has brought this to the forefront?
- In the past few weeks, have you wished you were dead?
- In the past few weeks, have you felt that the world would be better off without you?
- Have you thought about ending your own life?

### **If they answer yes to any of these questions, help them get support by:**

- calling Chugachmiut Behavioral Health at **1-844-891-0444**
- visiting the behavioral health aide at your local clinic

# Risk Factors

Suicide rarely has one single cause; people from any background or environment can feel suicidal. However, people affected by certain personal, social, cultural, or physical characteristics may be at higher risk of suicidal behavior.

Knowing the characteristics and circumstances that sometimes precede suicide can help identify someone who may be vulnerable.

## **Characteristics to look out for:**

- Feelings of depression or sadness
- Changes in food intake, sleep habits, and irritability
- Withdrawal or loss of interest in friends and family or activities
- Strong, sudden feelings of anger or rage
- Abuse of alcohol or drugs
- Head injuries
- Feelings of being trapped, like there is no way out
- Reckless or impulsive behavior
- Declining performance at work or school
- Feelings of excessive guilt or shame
- Excessive fears, worries, anxiety, or panic



## **Adverse Life Circumstances:**

- Recent trauma or life change(s)
  - Death of a friend or family member- especially to suicide
  - Loss of an interpersonal relationship
  - A major life change, like moving or coming out as LGBTQ+
  - A major loss or disappointment, like the loss of a job
- Disciplinary or legal problems
  - An upcoming court case or recent arrest
  - School or work conflict(s)
- Financial difficulties
  - An ongoing struggle to find work
  - Debt or other money-related stress
  - Gambling debts
- Physical, sexual, and/or psychological abuse or bullying
- Exposure to a violent or unexpected death

## **Other risk factors to consider:**

- Chronic physical illness or disability
- Depression, bipolar disorder, or another mental illness
- Addiction to alcohol, drugs, or gambling

# What to Do After a Suicidal Incident

Offer support and remain involved in the person's life as they recover from feeling suicidal and/or after making a suicide attempt.

## **Recovery takes time:**

- Keep listening. Don't avoid talking about suicide or the hard things in your life. Be available to have difficult conversations about what's going on in their life and how they're feeling.
- Offer to help them make an appointment with a behavioral health counselor or volunteer to accompany them to the clinic.
- Don't give up. Try not to lose contact with them, even if it seems like they are ignoring or avoiding you.
- Please encourage them to do things they enjoy, keep physically active, and connect with others.
- Help them build a support network that includes: friends, family, elders, faith leaders, and community groups.

**You may feel stressed, agitated, upset, or exhausted after helping someone through a suicidal incident. Remember to take care of yourself by:**

- Exercising to burn off the adrenaline and other stress hormones.
- Staying hydrated with plenty of water.
- Talking about the feelings that the crisis brought up with an ally.
- Limiting caffeine and other addictive substances.
- Perhaps write down some personal notes as to what happened while it is fresh in your mind.

## **Worst case scenario:**

- Sometimes, despite all of the love and compassion offered, people will choose to end their lives, their existence in this world.
- Remember, you have not failed. The person has made a decision based on the short term that affects everyone in the long term.
- Every counselor who has been in the field of helping people a long while has worked to save someone who has made the ultimate hurtful choice. What do we do? How do we go on? We comfort those left behind, and we later cry for the loss. And the next time that we are faced with similar circumstances, we apply the same caring, the same compassion, and we pray for a better outcome.

**Free and confidential help is available 24/7 through  
Chugachmiut Behavioral Health at 1-844-891-0444**

# Grief and Healing

The loss of a friend or family member can trigger an at-risk individual. If someone is vulnerable to suicide, it is even more important to have social support and practice healthy habits as they grieve.

While the trauma of losing a friend or family member can't be undone, helping them through their healing process can reduce the negative effects. **There is no normal time period for someone to grieve**—it may take months, a year, or longer. Grief may come in waves of intense sadness punctuated by moments of positive emotions. It is important to recognize the person's grief months and even years later, particularly on holidays, anniversaries, birthdays, and other special occasions. At these times, an at-risk person may need extra support.

## **We can offer support to someone who is grieving by:**

- Create a network of support— it's not about anyone saying or doing the exact right thing, nor can one person be everything for someone grieving.
- Inviting the grieving person to talk about what happened and to remember their loved one. Encourage them to say the name of the person they lost and to share memories.
- Allowing the person who is grieving to experience and accept their full range of emotions.
- Physically showing up and being with them.
- Checking in regularly via text or phone.
- Offering a hug or to hold their hand.



# How Can We Work to Prevent Suicide?

## **Build relationships in our communities.**

- Listen to concerns in a nonjudgmental way. Don't rush to jump in and offer solutions.
- Support others when they try new things, whether they succeed or fail. Accept them for who they are.
- Reach out and talk to others. Show them that they are valued. Ask them about their thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Really listen.

## **Facilitate emotional growth and build skills needed for living well.**

- Improve coping strategies and the ability to apply perspective to difficult situations. Circumstances change, and situations can get better.
- Develop skills in problem-solving and conflict-resolution.
- Encourage positive behaviors and help redirect negative behaviors.
- Be careful to NOT fall into the blaming game or to encourage anger at another person.
- Promote hopeful ideas and plans for the future.
- Model healthy relationships.
- If present, reduce the stigma around needing help. Reassure others that they aren't alone in their experiences.

## **Develop cultural continuity.**

- Observe and participate in traditional subsistence activities.
- Practice speaking Sugt'stun, Eyak, or other Alaska Native languages within the communities as appropriate.
- Cook together, traditional and other foods can bring people.
- Invite community members to join you in cultural activities and sports.
- When bad things happen, we all want to be seen as resources.

# **Important Phone Numbers to Contact for Help**

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