

how can I support someone sharing suicidal distress online?



You might be worried about someone having suicidal thoughts and feelings because of the things they are posting online but might not know how to offer help. **Reaching out to someone online can be an important source of support.**

A FEW THINGS YOU CAN DO

CONTACT THEM IN PRIVATE (DM/PM)

Mention their post and specify why you are worried about them. Ask them directly if they are thinking of suicide.

For example, you could say—

“I just wanted to check in, because you posted..., and I am worried about you. It sounds like you might be thinking of suicide, is that the case?”

“Do you want to talk about it?”

“Hi...! Your post really concerned me. I would like to help you if you would like.”

IF THERE IS IMMEDIATE DANGER TO THEIR LIFE

- Encourage them to call emergency services (102) or call emergency services on their behalf.
- Ask them to reach out to a trusted family member/friend. Or contact someone in their social network, or persons they live with if you can.
- If possible, try to engage in a conversation with them till help arrives.

IF THE PERSON IS NOT AT IMMEDIATE RISK

- Ask them if they would like to talk to you about it. Sometimes they might say no to your help, so it is best to not pressurize them. Let them know you are there if needed and they can talk to you whenever they feel comfortable.
- Ask them if they would like to seek support services (such as crisis helplines, mental health services, online counseling, etc.). If the person agrees, provide the relevant information.
- Follow up later over text or phone call to check if they are safe.

It can be discomfoting to be in this situation and you may feel like the onus of saving this person’s life is on you. This is a natural feeling, and there are two ways to respond to it. You may have feelings of fear, discomfort, and even helplessness. It is helpful to keep yourself grounded so you can support yourself and be fully present to the other person’s distress. At the same time, it is also necessary to keep in mind that you are not responsible for a person’s decision.

(Outlive is a suicide prevention programme for young people by Sangath, The Centre for Mental Health Law & Policy, and Quicksand. Learn more at www.outlive.in.)

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