

Suicide Prevention Resources

Safety Planning

Suicide safety planning for young people

A Safety Plan is an intervention designed to prevent suicide

It can be a useful tool when a young person is ambivalent about living or dying, whether these thoughts are vague or intense in nature, as it can help to contain distress and reduce the immediate risk of suicidal behaviour.

A Safety Plan involves the young person — ideally with support from a health professional or their local supports — identifying coping and help-seeking strategies that are tailored for their needs, situation and personal relationships. It prompts the young person to work through these steps — beginning with strategies they can employ themselves, such as relaxation exercises or participating in enjoyable activities, moving on to who they can contact for support — until they feel safe.

Safety planning should be undertaken by staff who are skilled and experienced in this process.

The Safety Plan should be completed as part of a broader conversation with the student about their mental health, suicide risks and need for further support. It's important to reinforce with the young person that if they feel at imminent risk and are unable to remain safe — even for a short period of time — they should seek immediate support from family, friends or emergency services.

[BeyondNow](#) enables people to develop a list of warning signs, coping strategies, reasons for living and ways to stay safe in a convenient and confidential free app. It can be easily accessed during times of distress and crisis, and can also be used in collaboration with health professionals or shared with family and close friends.

The Safety Plan

1. Recognising warning signs and personal triggering events
2. Creating a safe environment
3. Identifying reasons to live
4. Identifying things I can do by myself (internal coping strategies)
5. Connecting with people and places.
6. Reaching out to trusted family and friends in a crisis
7. Professional help.

Some young people may not wish to complete a step, or steps, in the Safety Plan.

Their plan is unique to them and is all about keeping safe, so if certain steps aren't helpful or create an additional source of burden, stress or conflict, these can be left out. A Safety Plan should be modified over time to ensure its effectiveness. The young person might review their Safety Plan with the wellbeing team, their health professional or another significant support person.

Key steps of the Safety Plan

When you're supporting a young person to create their Safety Plan, asking questions can help them think about what might work for their situation and ensure the identified strategies meet their individual needs.

Here are some questions you can use to help a young person develop a Safety Plan. The BeyondNow app and the associated information on the Beyond Blue website also list these prompts to help complete a Safety Plan.

1. Recognising warning signs and personal triggering events

Being aware of changes in thoughts, moods and behaviour that may signal a developing crisis allows the young person to act earlier, helping to reduce further risk.

Questions to ask might include:

- When do you think you could use your Safety Plan?
- What are some of the difficult thoughts, feelings or behaviours that you experience leading up to a crisis?

Warning signs might include:

- moods such as sadness, anxiety or irritability
- thoughts involving hopelessness, helplessness or self-criticism
- behaviours such as drinking more alcohol than usual, avoiding social situations or arguing more often with friends or loved ones.

2. Creating a safe environment

Identifying ways of keeping the young person's immediate environment safe can be achieved by reducing or eliminating their access to potentially lethal means. This can also include being aware of and avoiding stressful or upsetting situations.

Questions to ask might include:

- Are there any specific situations or people that you find stressful or triggering, or that contribute to your suicidal thoughts?
- What things do you have access to that are likely to be used in a suicide attempt?
- How can we develop a plan to limit your access to these means and avoid these situations?

Restricting access to lethal means might include:

- asking someone else to manage access to medication
- reducing access to firearms or improving safety procedures. (this step should always involve having a support person remove any firearms)
- getting rid of glass or blades that might be used to cause harm.

3. Identifying reasons to live

Developing a list of positive things in life that bring joy and meaning or that the young person can look forward to can help to change the young person's focus.

Questions to ask might include:

- What's the best thing about living?
- What's the most important thing in your life?
- What things in your future do you look forward to?

Reasons to live might include:

- family, friends or pets
- spiritual or religious beliefs
- everyday pleasures such as walking on the beach or enjoying nature
- life experiences such as having children or travelling.

4. Things I can do by myself (internal coping strategies)

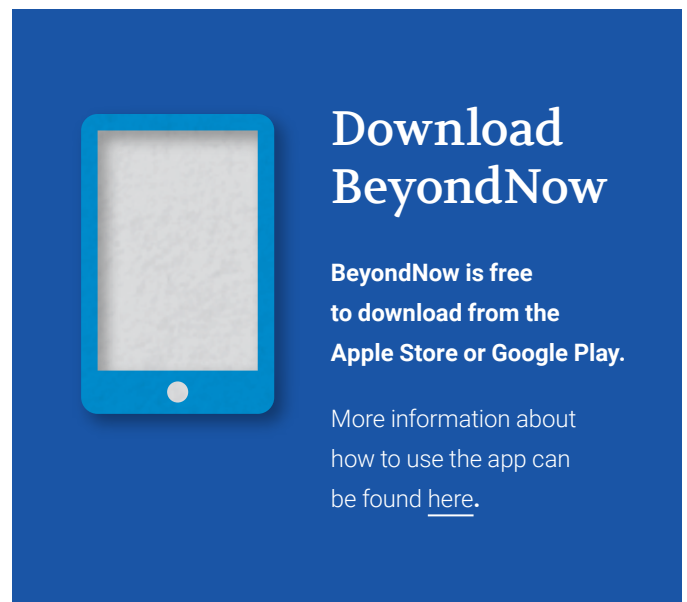
Identifying activities and internal coping strategies that a young person can do without contacting anyone else can help to regulate emotions, reduce distress, change the focus of thinking and distract from suicidal ideation, potentially preventing a further escalation into crisis.

Questions to ask might include:

- What can you do on your own if you have suicidal thoughts in the future to avoid acting on those thoughts?
- What can you do to help take your mind off your problems, even for a short amount of time?

Internal coping strategies might include:

- breathing or relaxation exercises
- going for a walk, doing yoga or other exercise
- watching a favourite movie or listening to a favourite band
- playing or cuddling with a pet.



The advertisement features a blue background. On the left is a stylized illustration of a smartphone with a blue border and a white screen. To the right of the phone, the text 'Download BeyondNow' is written in a large, white, serif font. Below this, in a smaller white sans-serif font, it says 'BeyondNow is free to download from the Apple Store or Google Play.' At the bottom right, it says 'More information about how to use the app can be found [here](#).'

5. Connecting with people and places

Just being around other people can provide distraction from suicidal thoughts. This can include spending time with family and friends or going to a busy park or shopping centre.

Questions to ask might include:

- Who helps you to feel good when you socialise with them?
- Where can you go and be around other people in a safe environment?

Socialisation strategies might include:

- spending time with friends and family, remembering that socialising can include activities that don't require much talking or engagement, such as watching TV
- going to a coffee shop, park, place of worship or meeting group.

6. Reaching out to trusted family and friends in a crisis

The young person should think carefully about who would be helpful in a crisis. Avoid listing people who could possibly exacerbate the situation.

Questions to ask might include:

- Among your friends and family, who do you feel you could talk to when you're having suicidal thoughts?
- Who do you feel you could contact to support you during a suicidal crisis?

7. Professional help

Health professional or support services that can be contacted during a suicidal crisis.

Questions to ask might include:

- Which services could you turn to for support?
- Which health professionals can you involve in your treatment plan?

Reviewing the Safety Plan

A Safety Plan should be modified over time to ensure its effectiveness.

As part of the monitoring of a young person identified as at risk of suicide, the wellbeing team or identified health professional should regularly check in with the young person about their use of the Safety Plan. These questions can be helpful in these discussions:

- How often has the young person needed to use the Safety Plan?
- What was the most useful aspect of the Safety Plan?
- Are there any barriers to its use?
- How will you continue to use the Safety Plan?

Monitoring a young person

Wellbeing staff can also use their knowledge of risk factors and warning signs to assist with monitoring a young person's level of risk and their mental health.

Where issues of concern are raised, the wellbeing team can facilitate the completion of a risk assessment to more thoroughly review the level of risk and what supports the young person may need to remain safe and supported.

Changes in mood, levels of participation and thinking patterns may indicate that a young person needs extra support, and that their Safety Plan might need some changes.

Changes in mood include:

- being irritable or angry with friends or family for no apparent reason
- feeling tense, restless, stressed or worried
- crying for no apparent reason or feeling sad or down for long periods of time.

Changes in levels of participation include:

- not enjoying or not wanting to be involved in things they would normally enjoy
- being involved in risky behaviour they'd normally avoid
- unusual sleeping or eating habits.

Changes in thinking patterns include:

- having a lot of negative thoughts
- expressing distorted thoughts about themselves and the world (for example, everything seems bad and pointless).

If staff become aware of changes in a young person, it's important that action is taken. They might be able to have a conversation with a young person or they might refer their concerns to the wellbeing team.



It's important to:

- ✓ recognise the young person's distress or concerning behaviour
- ✓ ask them about it (for example, "I've noticed you seem to be sad a lot at the moment")
- ✓ acknowledge their feelings (for example, "That seems like a really hard place to be in. I can understand why you're upset about that")
- ✓ get appropriate support and encourage healthy coping strategies (for example, "Do you need some help to handle this?")
- ✓ check in a short time afterwards to see how the young person's feeling.

Safety planning is a practical and accessible activity that young people can be encouraged to use to help them develop coping skills and identify what to do in times of crisis.

With delivery partners



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