

How to Talk to a Suicide Survivor

When talking to a suicide survivor, it's natural to worry about whether bringing it up is alright, whether you're saying the wrong things, their reaction and their mental state at the time.

Here are some of the best ways you can show them you care:

(1) Be patient

It may take some time before they open up and feel comfortable discussing what had happened. Reassure them that they're under no obligation to disclose anything they don't want to, they can take as long as they need to tell their story and that you're not going anywhere.

(2) Listen closely if they share their story

When someone wants to open up about their story, it takes a lot of courage and trust in you for them to do so. The best thing you can do for them is actively listen rather than interrupting, asking invasive questions or interrogating them.

(3) It's okay if you don't know what to say

It's completely normal to be afraid of saying the wrong thing. Sometimes all a person needs to know is that you're there for them and you care about them. You may not have to say much at all, just offer basic compassion and a listening ear. An honest, "I don't know what to say, but I'm here for you" can be sufficient.

(4) Offer help repeatedly and be specific

People may find it hard to reach out for help even though you've offered to be there. A simple "Let me know if you need anything" said once will not suffice. Do your best to check in on them as often as possible and offer to help them repeatedly so they have ample opportunity to take you up on your offer. It can be even more helpful to offer specific forms of help: a home cooked meal, running their errands, re-stocking their fridge, anything that you think would take the load off them.

(5) Avoid giving advice

It's okay to want to make sure the recently suicidal person is looking after their basic wellbeing needs (eating, sleeping, bathing, etc.), however, any advice beyond that is unnecessary unless explicitly asked for.

(6) Don't shame them for their past decision

Don't tell people they were being selfish or think of them as unstable. DO NOT ASSIGN BLAME - it's not their fault. They already face enough discrimination and stigma from society, they don't need someone adding to it.

And most importantly...

(7) Don't disappear

The months after the initial shock wears off can be the hardest. Continue to check in on them and let them know you care.