

# Prisoners- suicidal thoughts

## How to cope

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Being in prison can be a difficult time. This factsheet explains how you can get help if you feel like you want to end your life.



KEY POINTS

- Just try to get through today. Try not to focus on the future.
- Talk about your feelings with someone you trust.
- Speak to a healthcare professional at the prison.
- Do things you enjoy, such as drawing and writing in your cell, exercise or education.
- Raise the alarm in your cell if you want to hurt yourself or end your life now.

### This factsheet covers:

1. [How can I help myself now?](#)
2. [How can I get help and support?](#)
3. [Making a crisis plan in prison](#)
4. [Carers, friends and relatives](#)

## 1. How can I help myself now?

There are different things you can try to help yourself now. Everybody is different. So what works for someone else, might not work for you. You can try different things to see what helps.

### **Don't make a decision today**

You don't need to act on your thoughts straight away. You can make the decision to end your own life another time if you still want to.

Just think about getting through today and not the rest of your life. You might have found that you were able to cope with these thoughts a bit better in the past. You might be able to cope with them better again in the future.

### **Give things that make you feel worse to staff**

It might help to think about what made you feel low before. A trigger is something which might make you feel worse. Some people find that certain music or photos make them feel worse. Try and avoid these. Or give them to prison staff.

If you have anything that could help you to act on your thoughts, you can also give this to a staff member.

### **Distract yourself**

It can be hard to not think about negative things in prison. But thinking about ending your own life and the reasons you feel like this can make those feelings stronger. Try thinking about something else. Or try to distract yourself by keeping busy.

For example you could:

- tidy your cell,
- try writing or drawing something,
- choose an object and think of 30 different ways to use it,
- count to 500,
- be around other people when you are allowed,
- sign up to a class or job in prison,
- write down your negative thoughts and then screw the paper up and throw it away,
- read a book from the library, or
- write a letter to a relative or friend.

You might think these things won't take your mind off what you are thinking. But distracting yourself can be a useful way of managing your thoughts better.

## **Avoid alcohol or drugs**

Alcohol can affect your behaviour, judgement, concentration and emotions.<sup>1</sup> Try to avoid drinking alcohol if you are feeling suicidal. It can make you feel worse.<sup>2</sup>

Drugs also affect the way you think and feel.<sup>3</sup> Try and avoid drugs if you are feeling suicidal. You may be more likely to take your own life if you take illegal drugs.

## **Exercise**

Exercise can help you to feel good physically and feel better about yourself. Doing exercise can also give you something to focus on.<sup>4</sup> You could try doing crunches or yoga in your cell or visit the prison gym when you can.

There may be yoga classes on National Prison radio. Or you might be able to find books on yoga in the library. Or you can ask the Prison Phoenix trust to send you some free CD's and books on yoga.<sup>5</sup> Their contact details are in the 'Useful contacts' section below.

## **Relaxation**

Relaxing in prison can be difficult. But there are some things you can try to help.

Mindfulness is a type of meditation. It may help you to focus on the present moment. This may help stop you focusing on suicidal thoughts.

To practice mindfulness try sitting down and closing your eyes. Pay attention to how your mind and body feel. Try focusing on something like your breathing. Focus on how it feels when you breathe in and out. This can help you to be more aware of your thoughts and feelings. Being more aware of them can help you to deal with them better.

The Prison Phoenix Trust can also send you free materials on meditation.<sup>6</sup>

## **Make a list of positive things**

It might be hard to think of things right now, but try. Think about what's good about you. For example, are you kind? Are you helpful? Are you hard working?

Think about what's good in your life. For example, are you doing a course or a job in prison? Do you have people you can talk to? Are you looking forward to anything coming up in the future?

Writing this down and forcing yourself to think of things can help you avoid thinking about negative things as much.

## **Make a list of what helped when you were feeling low before**

Think about what helped when you have felt low in the past. For example, did you distract yourself with something or speak to someone? This list might be useful to look at whenever you feel low.

## **Talk to other people**

Talk to someone you trust, such as:

- prison staff,
- other prisoners, and
- family or friends.

You could also try calling an emotional helpline. You can read more about the people you can speak to in the next section. There is a list of emotional helplines you could call in the 'Useful Contacts' section below.

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## **2. How can I get help and support?**

You might feel alone, but remember that there are people who can help and who want to help you. Speaking to someone can help you feel better.

### **Doctors in prison**

You can speak to a doctor in prison. They could offer you medication or therapy if they think you have a mental health condition. To see a doctor you can make a 'general application'. The doctor can refer you to a specialist mental health team if they think you need more support.

You can find more information about '**Healthcare in Prison**' at [www.rethink.org](http://www.rethink.org). Or call our General Enquiries Team on 0121 522 7007 and ask them to send you a copy of our factsheet.

### **Safer Custody Team**

The Safer Custody Team (SCT) is a team of prison staff. They help to manage prisoners at risk of self-harm or suicide.<sup>7</sup> If a member of staff thinks you are at risk of self-harm or suicide, you will get help under the 'ACCT' process. This stands for 'Assessment, Care in Custody and Teamwork'. Any member of prison staff who is worried about you will record their concerns. The SCT will then plan how they can keep you safe.<sup>8</sup>

If you are worried that you are at risk of suicide, then speak to a member of staff. They can pass your details to the SCT.

### **Personal Officers**

When you go into prison you may be given a personal officer. This is a staff member that you can go to for information, advice and support. They are also the officer that will give you references for things like jobs or a change in status. Not all adult prisons run a personal officer scheme.<sup>9</sup>

If you are feeling suicidal your personal officer might be able to help. If you aren't sure who your personal officer is, ask another staff member to find out for you.

### **Prison chaplain**

A prison chaplain can give you spiritual support and guidance if you are feeling suicidal.<sup>10</sup> The chaplain will help people of all religions. They will also help you if you are not religious.<sup>11</sup> You may be able to see a humanist pastoral support visitor if you would prefer to see them.<sup>12</sup>

### **Listeners**

The listener scheme is run by the Samaritans. They train certain prisoners to become listeners. You can speak to a listener about how you are feeling. They can provide confidential, emotional support to you.<sup>13</sup>

### **Insiders**

Insiders are other prisoners who have been trained to give you information and reassurance when you first go to prison. They aim to make you feel less anxious during your first few days or weeks in prison.<sup>14</sup> You could speak to your insider if you need help.

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## **3. Making a crisis plan in prison**

A crisis plan is sometimes called a safety plan. It is there to help you be safe when you are feeling suicidal. You can make a plan as soon as possible if you are feeling suicidal. A doctor or someone from the Safer Custody Team may be able to help you make a crisis plan.

A crisis plan is something to help you think about what support you need when you are in crisis. In prison your options are more limited. But you could try listing the things that you can do to help yourself. You could also write down the names of your personal officer, insider or a listener at the prison. Having all this information to hand may help to make suicidal thoughts easier to handle.

There is no set way for how a crisis plan should look. But there is a crisis plan template at the end of this factsheet which you could use.

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## **4. Carers, friends and relatives**

You might be worried about your friend or relative while they are in prison. If you are worried that they may attempt suicide, it is important to speak to someone.

If you're worried you can:

- tell a member of staff when you visit,
- contact the 'Safer Custody Team', or

- contact the Duty Governor.

Some prisons have Safer Custody hotlines where you can leave a message explaining your concerns.

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### **Samaritans**

The Samaritans are there to listen to you if you want to talk to someone. All prisons should have direct lines to either the local branch or the national number.

**Telephone:** 116 123

**Address:** Freepost RSRB-KKBY-CYJK, Chris, PO Box 9090, STIRLING, FK8 2SA

**Website:** [www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)

**Face to face:** If there is no Listener at your prison, Samaritans may visit you. If you are on ROTL (Release on Temporary Licence), you can visit your local branch.

### **C.A.L.M. (Campaign Against Living Miserably)**

This organisation helps men dealing with suicidal thoughts or emotional distress. They have a webchat service available through their website.

**Telephone (outside London):** 0800 58 58 58 (5pm to midnight, 7 days per week)

**Telephone (London):** 0808 802 5858 (5pm to midnight, 7 days per week)

**Address:** CALM, PO Box 68766, London SE1P 4JZ

**Website:** [www.thecalmzone.net](http://www.thecalmzone.net)

### **Sane**

Sane run a national, out-of-hours helpline. They offer emotional support and information to anyone affected by mental illness. This includes family, friends and carers.

**Telephone:** 0300 304 7000 (4.30pm to 10.30pm 7 days per week)

**Website:** [www.sane.org.uk](http://www.sane.org.uk)

### **SupportLine**

They offer confidential emotional support to everyone by telephone, email and post. They can talk to you about any issue.

**Telephone:** 01708 765200 (hours change, ring to find out)

**Address:** PO Box 2860, Romford, Essex RM7 1JA

**E-mail:** [info@supportline.org.uk](mailto:info@supportline.org.uk)

**Website:** [www.supportline.org.uk](http://www.supportline.org.uk)

### **Switchboard – LGBT + Helpline**

Switchboard gives practical and emotional support for lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender people. You can talk to them about any issue. They have a webchat service on their website.

**Telephone:** 0300 330 0630 (open 10am – 10pm)

**E-mail:** [chris@switchboard.lgbt](mailto:chris@switchboard.lgbt)

**Website:** [www.switchboard.lgbt](http://www.switchboard.lgbt)

### **PAPYRUS**

This is a national charity to stop young suicide. They run HOPELineUK. They give advice to anyone up to the age of 35 who are worried about how they are feeling and anyone who is concerned about a young person.

**Telephone:** 0800 068 41 41 (open Monday to Friday 10am to 10pm, weekends 2pm to 10pm and bank holidays 2pm to 5pm)

**Text:** 07786 209697

**Address:** 67 Bewsey Street, Warrington, Cheshire WA2 7JQ

**Email:** [pat@papyrus-uk.org](mailto:pat@papyrus-uk.org)

**Website:** [www.papyrus-uk.org](http://www.papyrus-uk.org)

### **The Prison Phoenix Trust**

They help prisoners with yoga and meditation in prison. You can ask them to send free books to help with relaxation in your cell.

**Telephone:** 01865 512 521

**Address:** The Prison Phoenix Trust, PO Box 328, Oxford, OX2 7HF

**Email:** [all@theppt.org.uk](mailto:all@theppt.org.uk)

**Website:** [www.theppt.org.uk](http://www.theppt.org.uk)

### **Rehabilitation for Addicted Prisoners Trust (RAPt)**

This organisation can help people in prison with drug and alcohol addictions.

**Telephone:** 020 3752 5560

**Address:** The Foundry, 2nd Floor, 17 Oval Way, London, SE11 5RR

**Email:** [info@rapt.org.uk](mailto:info@rapt.org.uk)

**Website:** [www.rapt.org.uk](http://www.rapt.org.uk)

### **Alcoholics Anonymous Great Britain**

This organisation provide guidance and support to prisoners struggling with addiction. They can provide meetings and visits in prison.

**Telephone:** 0800 9177 650

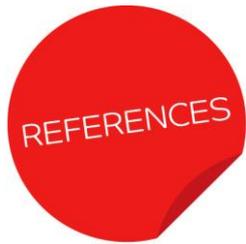
**Address:** Alcoholics Anonymous, PO Box 1, 10 Toft Green, York YO1 7NJ.

**Email:** [help@aamail.org](mailto:help@aamail.org)

**Website:** [www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk](http://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk)

## Crisis Plan Template

<b>What can help me now?</b>	<b>Who can I call?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Friend/relative</li><li>• Professional</li><li>• Helpline</li></ul>	<b>What would I say to someone else in my situation?</b>
<b>What can I do to keep myself safe?</b>	<b>What have I done before that's worked?</b>	<b>If the suicidal feelings won't go away, what should I do?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Speak to prison staff</li></ul>
<b>What can I do to distract myself?</b>	<b>What things make me feel worse that I should avoid?</b>	<b>Any other helpful thoughts and ideas</b>



- <sup>1</sup> National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. *Alcohol's effects on the body*. <http://www.niaaa.nih.gov/alcohol-health/alcohols-effects-body> (accessed 19 January 2017).
- <sup>2</sup> Mental Health Foundation. *Cheers? Understanding the relationship between alcohol and mental health*. London: Mental Health Foundation; 2006. Page 22.
- <sup>3</sup> National Institute for Health: National Institute on Drug Addiction. *Drugs, Brains and Behaviour: The Science of Addiction*. <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugs-brains-behavior-science-addiction/drugs-brain> (accessed 19 January 2017).
- <sup>4</sup> Royal College of Psychiatrists. *Physical Activity and Mental Health*. <http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/healthadvice/treatmentwellbeing/physicalactivity.aspx> (accessed 19 January 2017).
- <sup>5</sup> Prison Phoenix Trust. *Books*. <http://www.theppt.org.uk/books.php> (accessed 19 January 2017).
- <sup>6</sup> As note 5.
- <sup>7</sup> Ministry of Justice. *Management of prisoners at risk of harm to self, to others and from others (safer custody)*, PSI 64/2011. London: Ministry of Justice; 2013. Page 11.
- <sup>8</sup> As note 7, at page 7.
- <sup>9</sup> Ministry of Justice. *Residential Services*, PSI 75/2011. London: Ministry of Justice; 2011. Page 3.
- <sup>10</sup> Ministry of Justice. *Faith and Pastoral Care for Prisoners*, PSI 05/2016. London: Ministry of Justice; 2016. Page 22.
- <sup>11</sup> As note 10, at page 17.
- <sup>12</sup> British Humanist Association. *Chaplaincy and pastoral support*. <https://humanism.org.uk/campaigns/human-rights-and-equality/chaplaincy-and-pastoral-support/> (accessed 19 January 2017).
- <sup>13</sup> Samaritans. *The Listener Scheme*. <http://www.samaritans.org/your-community/our-work-prisons/listener-scheme> (accessed 19 January 2017).
- <sup>14</sup> As note 7, at page 25.

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This factsheet is available  
in large print.



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## Rethink Mental Illness Advice Service

Phone 0300 5000 927

Monday to Friday, 9:30am to 4pm  
(excluding bank holidays)

Email [advice@rethink.org](mailto:advice@rethink.org)

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### Did this help?

We'd love to know if this information helped you.

Drop us a line at: [feedback@rethink.org](mailto:feedback@rethink.org)

or write to us at Rethink Mental Illness:

RAIS  
PO Box 17106  
Birmingham B9 9LL

or call us on 0300 5000 927.

We're open 9:30am to 4pm  
Monday to Friday (excluding bank holidays)



Leading the way to a better  
quality of life for everyone  
affected by severe mental illness.

For further information  
on Rethink Mental Illness  
Phone 0121 522 7007  
Email [info@rethink.org](mailto:info@rethink.org)

 [facebook.com/rethinkcharity](https://www.facebook.com/rethinkcharity)

 [twitter.com/rethink\\_](https://twitter.com/rethink_)

 [www.rethink.org](http://www.rethink.org)

### Need more help?

Go to [www.rethink.org](http://www.rethink.org) for information on symptoms, treatments, money and benefits and your rights.

### Don't have access to the web?

Call us on 0121 522 7007. We are open Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm, and we will send you the information you need in the post.

### Need to talk to an adviser?

If you need practical advice, call us on 0300 5000 927 between 9:30am to 4pm, Monday to Friday. Our specialist advisers can help you with queries like how to apply for benefits, get access to care or make a complaint.

### Can you help us to keep going?

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