



WHAT HELPS WITH SUICIDE IDEATION AND POST-ATTEMPT SUPPORTING DOCUMENT TO IDAHO SCHOOL RESPONSE PROTOCOLS TO SUICIDE OR OTHER SUDDEN DEATH

The following ideas are for family members and friends seeking to help those who have attempted suicide or who have serious suicidal ideation. Some of these are adult specific, so please be aware and use age-appropriate methods to ensure we are not putting youth more at-risk.

The first six ideas are necessary, especially without a therapist on board. However, ongoing mental health help by a suicide-informed clinician, especially using dialectical behavior therapy (DBT) or cognitive behavior therapy (CBT) may be key to recovery.

Safety Plan

At the bottom of this document is a safety plan to be completed with the attempt survivor. You can also order [wallet-sized safety plans](#) through the Idaho Suicide Prevention Program. Research shows that because of their size and accessibility, the wallet-sized cards are used more and are less likely to be thrown away.

Walk attempt survivors through the safety plan and advise them to make multiple paper copies or take a picture with their phone so they always have a copy. Be sure to call each of the individuals named on the safety plan to confirm they will take calls, listen well and offer support. If they are concerned about how to talk with the attempt survivor, you can set the contacts using this Jason Foundation's ["A Friend Asks" app](#).

In addition, tell safety plan contacts they can call or text the Idaho Crisis and Suicide Hotline at 988 and ask for ways to help their friend or family member, or even de-escalate a crisis situation.

Means Restriction

Remove all means the attempt survivor thought of using or tried using. Restricting means has proven to be an effective strategy in reducing suicides. It is also symbolically important because it states, "we care about you and don't want you to die." You can create a routine that ensures the restriction is not permanent but their safety requires means to be temporarily restricted, especially guns. For example, give the attempt survivor a receipt letting them know any guns will be returned, when appropriate.

Follow-Up Care

Being released from hospitalization or short-term care is a critical time for those who have ideation. The first month after (sometimes up to six months) is often very tough for those who have been in inpatient treatment. After coming out of care, surround the attempt survivor with as many friends and family members or supports as possible. They absolutely need the additional support, as well as someone to be sure they are attending appointments with a suicide-informed mental health clinician.

Attempt Survivor Workbook

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration has published a resource guide to help people through the early steps of recovery and a hopeful future. [*A Journey Toward Health and Hope: Your Handbooks for Recovery After a Suicide Attempt.*](#)

Instill Belongingness and Capability

Have family and friends ask the attempt survivor to help plan or co-plan events, such as dinners, birthday parties, night out with friends, etc. This way, the attempt survivor becomes part of regular activities that cannot occur without them. Consider are helping the attempt survivor expand a hobby or activity that can be taught to other family members or friends. Also, everyone should be part of regular dinner activities – cooking, planning, eating together (no electronics), four nights or more per week.

- **Exercise:** Encourage a regular exercise routine whether it is walking, using a gym, yoga, etc. It is great if a couple of friends or family members join in and emphasize that this person is the reason they are going. Exercise routines and being valued by a group not only increase endorphins but also increases connection and a sense of belonging in the attempt survivor. You can also ask the attempt survivor where they can walk to just see or talk to other people (even if they don't know them) when they are down. Practice the route with them. Be aware of the attempt survivor's age, as this activity may not be appropriate without the guidance of a caring adult.
- **Volunteering:** Help the attempt survivor find a valuable volunteer activity. Family and friends might join this activity, as this builds connection. Some ideas include working to support an animal shelter (raising money, walking dogs, cleaning cages), reading to little kids, etc. Acts of generosity towards others help all of us focus on things outside of ourselves, while instilling a sense of connectivity and purpose.
- **Gratitude:** Text the attempt survivor each day to ask about three things they are grateful for. Be sure to share your own gratitude list with them. These texts should include new ideas each day for twenty-one days to establish habit. Practicing gratitude re-trains the brain to scan for the positives in everyday life. You may also add this to the safety plan or create a journal in which the attempt survivor writes down at least one thing that went well each day. The brain will relive the event and habituate to scanning the world for what is good.

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The person you are concerned about can write the answers to the questions below on a small card for a backpack, pocket or purse, or print out this page (cardstock is recommended) and cut along the dotted line to give him/her the safety plan to fill out. Once completed, you also might have them take a picture of the safety plan below with their phone to keep digitally.

A similar safety plan app for smart phones is available at my3app.org.

The steps on this safety plan are to be completed in numerical order so that the person has time to work through his/her thoughts. Practice all steps, including calling to ask for help. If using with youth, be sure that a positive adult is monitoring suicidality, or if a high level of suicidality is indicated, a clinician must monitor. Also, be sure to remove or lock up means that may be used to attempt suicide.

Re: #5b below: One activity proven to help is to have the person text someone three times per day with something he or she is grateful for (or text with three items at the end of each day). They may need reminders. Research shows that listing three things we are grateful for each day for 21 days physically changes the brain and teaches us to scan our days for the positive instead of the negative.

Re: #5d below: List names and phone numbers. These contacts must be vetted. Practice calling with the person.

MY SAFETY PLAN

1. Changes in thoughts, feelings and behaviors I notice when I begin to struggle:

2. If I have suicidal thoughts, I can (fill in each space with 2 or more activities):

a. Physical activities as stress relievers such as walk, work out, ride a bike, yoga:

b. Quiet, calming activities such as take a warm bath, write out my thoughts, meditate, pet my dog/cat, listen to calming music:

c. Concentration activities such as watch a funny show, read a book, cook/bake, play a musical instrument:

3. Five things to live for:

4. People and places to distract me:

5. If doing things for myself does not help, I can interact with or reach out to others.

a. Share feelings, thoughts, and triggering events that cause my suicidal thoughts with a trusted adult.

b. Write down, tell, or text to a trusted adult, something/someone that I am grateful for three times per day.

c. Something I can do to help someone else or a cause I'm passionate about right now: _____

d. Four trusted adults I can call or text to help me make myself feel better (names and phone numbers):

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

4) _____

6. Ways I can keep safe from methods of suicide:

7. If the above don't help me, I will call or text 988 or use online chat at idahocrisis.org.

If I feel that I am in danger of hurting myself or suicide, I will call 911 to be taken to the emergency room.