

# Suicide attempts



**headspace**  
School Support

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## What is a suicide attempt?

A suicide attempt is deliberately causing harm to one's self with the intent of ending one's life. The reasons why young people attempt suicide can be very complex. All suicide attempts should be taken seriously because this is likely to have implications for the future safety of the young person. Suicide attempts and self-harm behaviour are not the same, however depending on the severity of the behaviour it can be difficult to identify the young person's intent. For further information on self-harm behaviour please refer to the 'Self-harm' fact sheet.

## Who attempts suicide?

Young people who attempt suicide have significantly higher rates of mental illness compared with the general population. A quarter of all suicide attempts occur in young people aged between 15-24. Females aged between 15-19 years have the highest rate of suicide attempts while males have a higher rate of completed suicides. Those who have attempted suicide have an increased risk of making further attempts and thus increased chance of death.

## Why do people attempt suicide?

The reason people attempt suicide is often complex and difficult to understand. Below is a list of some common stressors that may lead people to consider suicide. People who attempt suicide are generally likely to be experiencing a combination of these, resulting in them feeling overwhelmed and unable to cope.

Some common reasons include:

- Having a mental illness. Disorders such as depression, anxiety, bipolar, psychotic disorders, and substance abuse increase the risk of someone experiencing suicidal thinking and behaviour.
- Difficulty coping with distressing life events. Examples of these include: parental separation, relationship breakdowns, bullying (physical, emotional, cyber), and school difficulties. These may seem particularly overwhelming if the young person is dealing with several issues at the same time.
- Feeling overwhelmed and not having the skills to manage.
- Feeling like there is nowhere to access support, or that nothing is going to help.
- Feeling isolated, alone or not belonging.

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## The impact of a suicide attempt

When someone attempts suicide it can have a significant impact on the people around them and people can react in different ways. This includes feelings of shock, denial, guilt, anger and shame. Suicide attempts can also have a direct impact on the wider community. Members of the community may be reminded of a former suicide attempt, the suicide or death of someone known to them, or other trauma they have experienced. If an individual is already at risk of suicide, hearing of a suicide attempt may further increase their risk.

Young people who have made a recent suicide attempt should be treated with care and compassion as they are likely to be vulnerable for some time following the attempt.

Supporting someone who has recently attempted suicide can be difficult and cause a great deal of anxiety. It's important to care for yourself and access available support so that you can then be supportive of the young person. For further information on this please see fact sheet on 'Self-care for school staff'.

If in doubt about a young person's safety, always refer them to a school wellbeing staff member or mental health professional.

## Marginalised Groups and Youth Suicide

Suicide is a difficult topic for many people, however for young people who identify as being part of a marginalised group such as Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) or Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Intersex (LGBTI), there are additional considerations to be aware of. When thinking about issues related to youth suicide it is very important to be aware of the unique needs of these groups and respond in the most appropriate way.

**If you believe that a young person is at imminent risk of suicide,** you should seek professional support from your local mental health service or emergency department and keep the young person safe until help arrives.

Remove any means of suicide available to them in the immediate vicinity, such as medications or weapons. Stay with him or her (or arrange for supervision) until they can be seen and assessed.

For more information on suicide or support and assistance visit [headspace.org.au/schoolsupport](http://headspace.org.au/schoolsupport) or [headspace.org.au](http://headspace.org.au)

### Other fact sheets that may be of interest:

*Returning to school following self harm or attempted suicide, Risk factors and warning signs for suicide, Self-harm and Self-care for school staff available at [www.headspace.org.au/schoolsupport](http://www.headspace.org.au/schoolsupport)*

Please refer to the **headspace** School Support *Suicide Postvention Toolkit – A Guide for Secondary Schools* for further guidance.

#### Acknowledgements

Life [www.livingisforeveryone.com.au](http://www.livingisforeveryone.com.au)