

BRIGHTER FUTURES

Strategies for Aiding Recovery
after a Suicide Attempt

by Michael Boyack



Your community. Your advocates.

The Issue

According to the World Health Organization, around 800,000 people die by suicide every year. In the US, suicide is the 10th leading cause of death, ranking far above causes such as homicide and war. With figures like these, suicide is an issue deserving of everyone's attention.

Although suicide is a complex issue, it is preventable. In order to understand how we can help, we must take one step at a time. This guide is meant to do just that; help us take a step forward in solving this issue.

Rather than broadly covering this issue, this guide will focus specifically on strategies for helping those who are recovering from a suicide attempt. It will provide evidence-based suggestions for engagement on an individual, community, and official level.

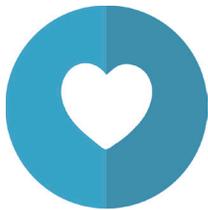
Research shows that for every completed suicide, there are more than 20 suicide attempts. The strongest predictor of a suicide is a previous suicide attempt. That's why this guide focuses on ways to help those who have already attempted suicide. There might be a tendency to think that if someone has attempted suicide and lived through it, they'll be less likely to attempt again. This is historically untrue. In one study of 302 people who had previously attempted suicide, 37% of them made at least one further suicide attempt, and 6.7% of them eventually died by suicide in a period of 5 years. It is extremely important to have methods for recognizing suicidal behavior and intervening before an attempt but plans and strategies for helping those after an attempt are just as vital.

**MORE THAN
SUICIDE ATTEMPTS** **20**
TO EVERY COMPLETED SUICIDE

Individual

An individual can have a positive impact on someone who has attempted suicide. Multiple studies have shown that constructive engagement with a person following a suicide attempt enhances their recovery.

Here's what that constructive engagement looks like:



- Active listening, making sure they feel heard & understood
- Letting them know they are not alone
- Sharing stories of hope and recovery
- Sharing information that challenges stigma
- Physically being with them
- Creating a recovery plan alongside them

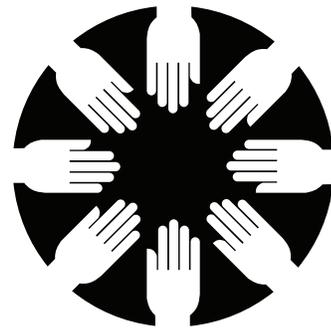
People who have attempted suicide need accurate information about recovery, but this is not enough. They need individuals who can provide information in a caring and loving manner. They also need supporters who will help them feel comfortable sharing why they attempted suicide. After a person attempts suicide, it's common for them to believe that others will see them as an embarrassment. There is a stigma that those who attempt suicide are weak or selfish. People recovering from a suicide attempt need individuals who believe and communicate in opposition to this stigma. They need messages of strength and support. With these methods, any individual with a relationship to someone who has attempted suicide can make a positive difference.

Considerations

Anytime someone wants to get involved in helping a person who is recovering from a suicide attempt, there needs to be considerations regarding their health and privacy. Those who are not immediate family or caretakers should always take steps to make sure that the privacy and health needs of any affected individuals and their family members are being served before engaging. Those who are immediate family or caretakers should be in contact with healthcare professionals on a regular basis throughout the recovery process.

Community

For a community to aid in recovery, it must be prepared ahead of time. A community can start a conversation about how to accept and support members who have struggled with or attempted suicide. Businesses, schools, churches, and other community organizations can work to provide training with the assistance of credible professionals. A community that has an open conversation about accepting and assisting those who have attempted suicide will be better equipped to help those people become valued members of society.



Here are some concrete examples of how a community can get involved in helping people recover from suicide attempts:

- Establish support networks of individuals who can meet together to share with and strengthen one another. See the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention website for examples (<https://afsp.org/find-a-support-group>)
- Offer programs for the improvement of affected individuals' physical & mental health. See the Warrior Surf Foundation for an example (<https://www.warriorsurf.org/>)
- Hold or take part in events specifically for suicide prevention awareness and education. See examples on the International Association for Suicide Prevention's website (<https://www.iasp.info/wspd2019/suggested-activities/>)

Considerations

In order for communities to organize and execute plans regarding recovery, connectedness is vital. Organizations must communicate and work together within the community so that efforts are consistent across the board. Again, communities should also take steps to ensure that the immediate health and privacy needs of those affected by a suicide attempt are met. Communities should make plans that will best serve their individual situations and that are backed by credible research.

Official

90%

OF INDIVIDUALS WHO DIE BY SUICIDE WERE LIVING WITH
DIAGNOSABLE MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS

At an official level, individuals, communities, and policymakers should work together to best support the recovery of those who have attempted suicide. The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention reports that “upwards of 90% of individuals who ultimately die by suicide were living with a diagnosable mental health condition at the time of their death.” In the same vein, many who attempt suicide have mental health conditions which are both diagnosable and treatable. That’s why legislation regarding mental health parity is so important.

Mental health parity means that insurance coverage for mental health treatment is as equally accessible and affordable as coverage for physical health treatment. With policies that promote parity for mental health coverage, those who have attempted suicide will have more resources made accessible to them for recovery.

Another way to help on an official level is to push for funding of suicide prevention research. To put it simply, the more we understand, the more we can help.

One final way to help is to create and support policies that mandate training for schools, police departments, and other state-run organizations. Policies like these will help officials know how to respond to someone who has attempted suicide.

Take Action!

Whether you have influence at an individual, a community, or an official level, **YOU can take action. **YOU** have the power to help those recovering from a suicide attempt. Make a plan and put it to work!**

For more resources, check out this list of organizations and their websites:

- U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)
<http://www.samhsa.gov>
- American Association of Suicidology (AAS) <http://www.suicidology.org>
- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) <http://www.afsp.org>
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline <http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org>
- Suicide Awareness Voices of Education (SAVE) <http://www.save.org>
- Trevor Project <http://www.thetrevorproject.org/>

Sources

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The logo for 'VOICE' is centered within a white circle. The word 'VOICE' is written in a bold, black, sans-serif font. The letter 'O' is replaced by a stylized hand icon with fingers spread, colored in a light blue-grey. The background of the page features a large white circle containing the logo, set against a background of geometric shapes in shades of orange and blue.

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