

Take Action Workbook

Module 1 Make a safety plan

If depression or difficult circumstances have brought you low enough to consider suicide then it is vital to know that there *are* ways to turn things around. Likewise, if the emotional pain you are experiencing has led to a habit of inflicting deliberate harm on yourself, it is important to know that there *are* alternatives and ways forward.

Both suicidal thoughts and urges to self-harm are a lot more common than many people realise and arise from understandable causes and intentions. This module helps you to make more sense of your suicidal and self-harming urges and to take responsibility for planning to keep yourself safe.

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Many people who have attempted or come close to suicide look back in gratitude that they were not successful in acting on their intentions. This worksheet aims to help you make more sense of your suicidal thoughts and learn strategies for surviving them. It guides you in creating a Safety Plan to help you keep yourself safe when you are at risk.

If you have made specific plans and think you may act on them imminently then it is vital that you get help now:

Ring 999 or get yourself quickly to your local hospital's A&E (accident and emergency) department, and tell them clearly that you are at risk to yourself.

If you are not on the point of acting but are concerned about a risk that you may act impulsively on suicidal thoughts use the general safety plan set out below or follow your own safety plan if you have one.

1. A general safety plan

If you are feeling actively suicidal at the moment then follow this general safety plan to keep yourself safe and get help:

- Make a deal with yourself that you will not act just yet – give yourself time to find help and work out a better solution.
- Tell someone else how you are feeling or find someone to be with you.
- If that is not possible right now, phone an all-hours contact from the list below:

Samaritans – 24hrs trained listening	T: 08457 909090 E: jo@samaritans.org
NHS Direct (England & Wales) NHS Direct (Scotland)	T: 0845 4647 T: 08454 232323 or phone your local GP's out of hours service
HOPEline UK – specialist suicide helpline for children, teenagers and young people up to the age of 35	T: 08000 684141 SMS: 0776 209697 E: pat@papyrus-uk.org
Get Connected – local counselling for under 25s (free from mobile phones)	T: 08088 084994
Nightline – all night student listening	www.nightline.ac.uk
International email and phone help details	www.befrienders.org

- If possible, ask someone to help you make a plan for keeping yourself safe – put dangerous items out of reach or give them to someone else to look after for you.
- Make a concrete plan for getting professional support as soon as possible eg. plan when you will phone to make an appointment with your doctor or a counsellor, or ask someone to help you do this.
- In the meantime, do something to distract yourself from your thoughts for a while – watch TV or a DVD; read a book; write in a diary; tidy your room or sort out a pile of papers etc.

2. A personal safety plan

If you are not at immediate risk but the depression spiral sometimes brings you low enough to consider suicide then it is worth making a personalised Safety Plan. A Safety Plan gives you something to follow step by step to remind you of support you can call upon and strategies you can use to help reduce and cope with the pain you are feeling. It gives you concrete alternatives to acting on your thoughts.

The 'Surviving suicidal thoughts' page sets out a list of the types of strategies it would be good to include. A good safety plan includes discussion with members of your support network and negotiation about what support others can and can't offer. (If you feel you don't yet have a support network use the 'Build a support network' section to consider the many options which may be available to you.)

Use the Safety Plan framework attached to devise your safety plan, then make a copy for the important people in your support network.

To support yourself in taking positive steps forward it is very helpful to write an 'implementation intention' statement, ie. give yourself a clear goal for how you will take action. Can you take an important first step and commit to filling in this intention statement right now?

My Safety Plan intention statement:

I commit to making myself a Safety Plan by _____ (date).

I will ask _____ (trusted friend, family member, counsellor) to help me make the plan.

I will ask _____ (trusted friend, family member, crisis support worker) to keep a copy.



"Don't do it! Now that I feel a bit better the suicide pact I made with myself seems like a pretty silly idea - and that's what I would have said to someone else if they'd told me about it, but I applied it differently to myself at the time." - Charlie

It will be easier to devise a good safety plan with the help of a professional like a counsellor.



"My doctor suggested writing a letter from my 'well self' to my 'suicidal self' to read at times of crisis. It was very effective to read the words coming 'from myself', with options and things that might help." - Iona



Fill in this Safety Plan with precise details that are relevant to you for each step, then keep it somewhere where you can access it easily when you need it.

If I am feeling overwhelmed and in danger of acting on suicidal thoughts, I will do the following:	
<p>1. I will make a deal with myself not to act on this immediately and to follow my Safety Plan to reduce the risk of acting on these thoughts. <i>(Write a clear statement using 'I' that you can read and repeat to yourself: eg. "I will help the bit of me that does want to survive." "I will give myself time to try to take care of myself and help myself feel a bit better.")</i></p>	
<p>2. I will speak to myself with compassion and caring, reminding myself of ways to calm myself down and soothe myself: <i>(Write down caring things you can say to yourself, thinking about what you might say to a friend who was feeling this bad eg. "It's hard to feel this way – try to be kind to yourself." "These are just thoughts – you don't need to act on them." "Remember your breathing and relaxation techniques.")</i></p>	<p>I can say:</p>
<p>3. I will call one of the following people: <i>(It's a good idea to save these numbers in your phone contacts under a relevant heading like 'Help'. You could also see if one or more of the listed people would agree to keep a copy of your Safety Plan and help talk you through it if necessary)</i></p>	<p>Friend: (Number) _____</p> <p>Parent/relative: (Number) _____</p> <p>Doctor: (Number) _____</p> <p>Campus Nightline: (Number) _____</p> <p>Samaritans: T: 08457 90 90 90 E: jo@samaritans.org</p> <p>HOPEline UK: T: 0800 068 41 41 SMS: 0776 209 697 E: pat@papyrus-uk.org</p> <p>Get Connected: T: 0808 808 4994</p> <p>Other: (Number) _____</p>
<p>4. I will make myself safe from acting impulsively by: <i>(Write down what you can do to make it more difficult for you to harm yourself eg. not drinking alcohol or taking any drugs while you are feeling this way, also note who you can give medication stockpiles to, what items should be kept locked away, who you can call in an emergency to help you keep yourself safe.)</i></p>	<p>I will _____</p> <p>I will _____</p> <p>I will _____</p> <p>I will _____</p>

<p>5. Other people can help me by: <i>(Write down reminders of the kind of help you can ask other people for eg. keeping me company or letting me come over, being in touch with me online, taking away dangerous items for safe-keeping)</i></p>	
<p>6. I will choose something from my list of self-soothing distractions and focus on it for at least 20 minutes: <i>(eg. watch TV or a light-hearted DVD; read a book; write in a diary; tidy my room; have a soothing bath; go for a walk with upbeat music on my mp3 player; focus on my breathing or listen to a relaxation or mindfulness mp3; etc – see ‘Taking care of myself’ for more self-soothing ideas)</i></p>	<p>My self-soothing list:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____ 5. _____ 6. _____ 7. _____ 8. _____ 9. _____ 10. _____
<p>7. I will remind myself of my coping statements and what has helped me before: <i>(Write down one or more coping statements that you can repeat to yourself: eg. “I have survived so far, and I will make a commitment to surviving for another hour/day.” “These are just thoughts – I don’t have to act on them.” “This feeling will pass.”)</i></p>	
<p>8. If I still feel suicidal and at risk a safe place I can go to is: <i>(Write down places you may be able to go if you still feel at risk eg. friend who has agreed to be available – check limits to this; halls welfare officer; campus emergency support services; nearest A&E remembering to tell them you feel you are a danger to yourself)</i></p>	
<p>9. Any other thoughts of my own that might help me when I’m low:</p>	

3. Longer-term strategies

A Safety Plan helps you cope with an immediate crisis, but in the longer term you can learn how to address the suicidal thinking ‘habit’ and reduce the intensity and impact of such thoughts.

It can be helpful to realise that thoughts about suicide can be quite common – one of the many ways that the mind uses to test out feelings. However, suicidal thinking is an extreme version of the type of ‘tunnel vision’ and all-or-nothing thinking that is a typical characteristic of depressed thinking styles.

Just as with all types of depressed thinking, you can learn to ride out your suicidal thoughts, reduce their frequency and eventually stop them bothering you. Read the ‘Thinking about suicide’ and ‘Making sense of suicide’ pages to understand more about how to start critically evaluating what your mind is doing when it gets drawn back into thoughts about suicide as a ‘solution’ to your problems. Use the ‘Change your thinking’ section to learn powerful techniques for challenging and these and other forms of depressed thinking.

You may also like to read Ben’s story, and search the Student Stories section for other stories about students who seriously considered or attempted suicide, and who look back now with gratitude that they have moved on from the tunnel vision they had then.

Use this section to make notes about what you learn from these sections of the site:



“When you’re in the frame of mind where killing yourself feels like a perfectly valid and acceptable option, your sense of perspective is out of the window. I’m glad the bit of me that wanted to survive held out.” – Ben



Deliberate self-harm is a complex issue, and can be difficult for those affected to talk about or make sense of. While there are many different reasons and histories for why people who find themselves self-harming, many come to see it as a kind of 'coping strategy' for dealing with overwhelming or painful feelings.

It is a difficult paradox that deliberately harming yourself is something that you do to try to help yourself with things that feel unmanageable. However, this underlying intention of taking care of yourself is exactly what can be harnessed to help you find more constructive ways forward. Although it takes time, courage and determination, there are ways to learn to manage difficult feelings differently and to free yourself from the painful burden of self-harming urges.

This worksheet helps you put together a 'Self-Harm Coping Plan' so that you can remind yourself about alternatives and more constructive strategies for dealing with your feelings when you feel the urge to self-harm.

Proceed with caution

Thinking and writing about self-harm may be a 'triggering' experience for some people. Get appropriate support when you are using this worksheet, so that you can manage any feelings that arise without resorting to self-harm. A self-harm reduction plan is best undertaken with professional support.

1. Understanding your self-harm

Read the pages on 'Understanding self-harm' and 'Coping with self-harming urges'. What have you learnt about self-harm that you didn't know already? Do you have any insight into your own self-harm habit – what it does for you and what factors maintain this behaviour?



You will also be only too aware of the damage you are doing to yourself by continuing to use this method of managing your feelings. Are you ready to commit to creating and embarking on a self-harm reduction plan?

My self-harm reduction intention statement

I am ready to commit to reducing my self-harming behaviour.

I will fill in my Self-Harm Coping Plan by _____ (date).

I will ask _____ (friend or professional) to help me write my plan.

I will commit to using my Self-Harm Coping Plan whenever I feel the urge to self-harm.


Remember that you don't need to go 'cold turkey' and give up completely - this is a step by step approach to reducing the impact of self-harm while you slowly replace it with more constructive strategies for managing your feelings

2. Making a self-harm coping plan

The attached framework sets out a series of steps for you to follow whenever you notice the urge to self-harm. Giving yourself these steps to follow helps you to learn your triggers and find alternative ways to manage your feelings. In the early stages you may still go on to use self-harm – however, the plan also helps you reduce the damage you cause. Gradually you can learn skills like mindfulness and emotion tolerance which will allow you to manage very difficult feelings without resorting to self-harm.

3. Next steps

A self-harm reduction plan is best undertaken with the help of a good support network. Use the 'Build your support network' section to make sure you have as much support as possible.



"Self-harm doesn't make you feel any better in the long run. It is much better to let out your emotions; have a good cry, do something creative, or if you're not a very creative person, then do something else like go for a walk or a run." – Lucy

Fill in this Safety Plan with precise details that are relevant to you for each step, then keep it somewhere where you can access it easily when you need it. The aim is to try not to get to the end of the plan.

If I am feeling overwhelmed and in danger of acting on urges to harm myself deliberately, I will do the following:	
<p>1. I will make a deal with myself not to act on this immediately and to follow my Coping Plan to reduce the risk of acting on these thoughts. <i>(Write a clear statement using 'I' that you can read and repeat to yourself: eg. "I will give myself time to notice what I am feeling and help myself in other ways before I consider using self-harm to cope.")</i></p>	
<p>2. I will speak to myself with compassion and caring, reminding myself of ways to calm myself down and soothe myself: <i>(Write down caring things you can say to yourself, thinking about what you might say to a friend who was feeling this bad eg. "It's hard to feel this way – try to be kind to yourself." "These are just thoughts – you don't need to act on them." "Remember your breathing and relaxation techniques.")</i></p>	<p>I can say:</p>
<p>3. I will reduce the risk of acting on my self-harming urges by removing dangerous items and avoiding risky behaviour: <i>(Write down what you can do to make it more difficult for you to harm yourself eg. not drinking alcohol or taking any drugs while you are feeling this way, also note what items should be kept locked away, and who you can call in an emergency to help you keep yourself safe)</i></p>	<p>I will _____</p> <p>I will _____</p> <p>I will _____</p> <p>I will _____</p>
<p>4. I will resist the immediate urge to make the feelings go away and will try to tune in to what has triggered my urge to self-harm and to name the feelings that I am feeling. <i>(It is a good idea to identify how you will do this, eg. have somewhere to write down what you notice about how you feel)</i></p>	<p>I will identify my feelings by:</p>

<p>5. I will remind myself of the following options for expressing my feelings in creative ways and choose at least one of them to try: <i>(eg. having a good cry, doing vigorous activity or exercise like going for a run, writing all my feelings down, drawing or using other creative expression like playing music, telling someone else how I am really feeling, keeping a blog, using a list of feelings words to underline which ones I am feeling right now)</i></p>	<p>Ways I can express my feelings:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. _____2. _____3. _____4. _____5. _____6. _____7. _____8. _____9. _____10. _____
<p>6. I will remind myself of the following options for soothing and taking care of myself when I am experiencing difficult feelings: <i>(eg. have a soothing bath; go for a walk with upbeat music on my mp3 player; focus on my breathing or listen to a relaxation or mindfulness mp3; get outside into natural surroundings; take time to cook a tasty meal; contact a friend or family member; give myself a hug, or do some self-massage etc – see ‘Taking care of myself’ for more self-soothing ideas)</i></p>	<p>My self-soothing list:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. _____2. _____3. _____4. _____5. _____6. _____7. _____8. _____9. _____10. _____
<p>7. Once I have paid attention to my feelings (or if I have found it too difficult to do that right now) and I have tried some self-soothing strategies, I can choose one of the following activities to distract myself: <i>(eg. watch TV or a light-hearted DVD; read a book; write in a diary; tidy my room; getting some of my work done; connecting up with housemates or friends; people watching in the park; going for a run or doing other exercise; doing something creative – see ‘Focusing outward’ for more ideas)</i></p>	<p>My list of constructive distractions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. _____2. _____3. _____4. _____5. _____6. _____7. _____8. _____9. _____10. _____

<p>8. Other people can help me by: <i>(Write down reminders of the specific kinds of help you can ask other people for eg. keeping me company or letting me come over, being in touch with me online, taking away dangerous items for safe-keeping, giving me a hug)</i></p>	
<p>9. If I have tried my best to use the previous steps to help me with my difficult feelings and I am still feeling like I need to use self-harm then I will try the following substitute/s first: <i>(Choose a technique to substitute for self-harm eg. squeezing an ice cube, snapping an elastic band against your wrist, hitting a pillow or cushion etc)</i></p>	<p>Instead of self-harm I will try:</p>
<p>10. If I still feel the need to self-harm I will do my best to limit the damage by: <i>(eg. scratching instead of cutting, or whatever less intense version is relevant to your usual form of self-harm)</i></p>	
<p>11. If I have hurt myself I will still try to treat myself with compassion and take the best care of myself that I can by: <i>(eg. attending to the physical damage and using first aid, seeking out help and support from others, returning to the self-soothing list and comforting myself with something constructive etc.)</i></p>	<p>I will _____</p> <p>I will _____</p> <p>I will _____</p> <p>I will _____</p>
<p>12. Any other thoughts of my own that might help me when I am being disturbed by urges to self-harm:</p>	