To Learn More
National Institute of Mental Health
www.nimh.nih.gov

Mental Health America
www.mentalhealthamerica.net
Everyone feels down at times.

People can get overwhelmed by work or studies. They may have money worries. Relationships may end. A friend or family member may become ill or die.

It's normal to have feelings.
When difficult things happen, people may feel sad, anxious, angry, hopeless or frustrated. After a few days or weeks, most people begin to have moments when they feel OK again. After a while, the times of feeling OK last longer than the times of feeling bad.

Thoughts about suicide are not a normal response to stress.
If someone thinks about suicide a few times a week or almost every day, it's a sign of a serious health problem. Most people don't respond to stress or troubles in this way.

Thoughts about suicide are important signals.
You wouldn't ignore having a high fever or severe stomach pain. People who have thoughts of suicide are getting an important message. Their bodies and brains are telling them that something needs to change.

What causes suicide thoughts?
People may think about suicide because:
• They're feeling great pain.
• They're having trouble finding solutions for their problems.
• They may feel they don't deserve the time or effort it would take to get help.

Suicide is not the answer. These things can be changed.

Suicidal feelings don't last forever.
Thoughts of suicide are often due to several factors.
• People may have personal troubles.
• They may have physical or mental health problems.
• They may not be able to turn to others for help.

When these things all happen at once, it can cause a crisis.
This is why health professionals take suicide thoughts seriously. When people who are thinking about suicide get treatment, and are prevented from harming themselves, things can change.

What Can You Do?

If you are having suicide thoughts:
• Take it seriously. Treat it as you would severe physical symptoms.
• Don't try to "go it alone." It can be hard to tell these thoughts and feelings to others and ask for help. But it's very important to do so.
• Talk to a professional who can help:
  — a counselor, therapist or campus counseling services
  — a doctor or other health care provider
• Talk to others who can offer support:
  — parents or other family members
  — friends
  — a teacher

Choose people you trust, who won't judge you and will urge you to get appropriate care.
• Talk to clergy if you are religious or spiritual.
• Avoid alcohol or other drugs. They increase the risk you will harm yourself.

"I felt hopeless and was thinking about suicide a lot. I also felt embarrassed, so I didn't want to talk about it. A friend took me to the counseling center. I learned some new ways to cope. I'm really glad I didn't hurt myself."
— Staci L.

If a friend talks about suicide:
• Listen closely and without judgment. Remain calm. Treat the talk seriously. Show by your tone and manner that you are concerned.
• Acknowledge the pain and confusion your friend feels.
• Urge your friend to seek professional help. Offer to go along to a crisis center or counseling appointment.
• If the person is in danger, don't leave him or her alone. Remove weapons (especially guns), or other means of self-harm. Call 9-1-1. Get someone else to help you.
• Tell a professional about the situation, even if it means breaking a confidence.
• Get support and take care of yourself. Talk to a counselor, your friends, your parents, a crisis line, or others you trust.

When people who are thinking about suicide get treatment, things can change.
Does Treatment Really Help?

Yes! Treatment can:
- Protect the person from harm during the crisis.
- Provide support for strong emotions.
- Teach new ways to think so life events won’t feel so overwhelming.
- Build skills for solving problems, resolving conflict, coping with stress and connecting with others.
- Build confidence and self-esteem.

When appropriate, medications can treat anxiety, depression, panic attacks, bipolar disorder or other conditions.

“I’m not thinking about suicide, exactly…”

Some people think about harming themselves, but not so seriously that they would die. They may wonder what would happen if they died. They might imagine killing themselves, even though they don’t really want to.

These thoughts can keep coming back. They may pop up unwanted and be distressing. They can interfere with school, work or relationships.

These thoughts can also be treated successfully. See a counselor.

Have Hope

People who have had suicide thoughts and gotten through the crisis give these reasons to be hopeful:
- It doesn’t last forever.
- Treatment helps.
- Life can be better again.

“I’ve always been moody. But things got worse when I started college. I started thinking about suicide. It scared me.

“I went to the health clinic and talked to the doctor. Now I’m seeing a counselor and taking antidepressants. I’m much calmer, and can focus on my classes. It’s definitely better.”

—Derek D.