



# CULTIVATING LIFE

== TOOLKIT ==







# DO SUICIDAL PEOPLE WANT TO DIE?

Suicidal people often believe that they have tried everything to stop the pain. However, the pain makes it difficult to think clearly, consider options, or remember reasons to stay alive.

Seeking professional help is a big step toward easing the emotional pain. **With help, your loved one can feel well again.**

*Most suicidal people do not want to die. They are experiencing severe emotional pain, and are desperate for the pain to go away.*

## WHY DO FARMERS AND RANCHERS STRUGGLE WITH MENTAL HEALTH?

Farming and ranching can be emotionally challenging for adults. The pressures and uncertainties in this profession can take a toll on mental health.

Adults in the agricultural industry often face unique stressors, making it hard for others to understand the emotional and physical strains they endure. Despite their outward appearance of strength, farmers and ranchers grapple with the complexities of their roles. They are constantly navigating the expectations of family, community, and the agricultural world. In the transition from managing the land and livestock to addressing personal struggles, they live with a constant juggling act of responsibilities, creating a breeding ground for conflicting emotions. It can be challenging to differentiate between the normal stress of farming life and more severe mental health issues.

This is why engaging in open conversations and tackling uncomfortable questions is crucial. Take the time to listen, and remind them that overwhelming and confusing feelings are a normal part of the adult experience in agriculture. If these feelings become too much to cope with, seeking help is the best course of action.

*Ask directly about suicide. It will give them permission to talk about it with you.*



# WHAT SHOULD I REMOVE FROM MY HOME RIGHT NOW?

It is important to make your home as safe as possible, especially if your loved one is experiencing severe stress, anxiety or depression.



**Guns:** Firearms should be removed from the home. Ask a relative, neighbor, or friend if they can hold them for you. If you are unable to find a safe place to store them, most police departments will hold your firearms for safekeeping. Call your local police department for more information.

More than half of all suicide deaths are the result of a gunshot wound. If you are unable to remove the weapons from the home, make sure that they are locked up securely.

Change the combination code; take gunlock keys and any ammunition out of the home. Typically, loved ones know where keys are hidden and what the pass codes or PIN numbers are. Many police departments have free gun locks that are given to anyone who asks for them.



**Poisons and medications:** Removing poisons, pills or any medications, including over-the-counter, everyday medications is important. You can call Poison Control at 1-800-222-1222 to find out a safe amount of medication to keep on hand.



**Alcohol and drugs** in the home increase the risk of suicide.

There are other ways people end their lives. Ask your loved one if there is something he or she has thought of using for suicide. If so, remove that as well.

*The presence of a gun in the home of a young person doubles the chance that they will die from suicide. This is true even if the guns are locked up.*



## DO I REALLY NEED TO WATCH FOR SUICIDE?

Farmers and ranchers face unique challenges, and it's important to address mental health concerns within this community. Suicides among farmers are 1.5 times higher than the national average, and this statistic may be underestimated as some farm suicides could be masked as farm-related accidents. Understanding the factors contributing to mental health struggles in the farming and ranching profession is crucial for supporting the well-being of our agricultural community.



## HOW DO I KNOW IF MY LOVED ONE IS SUICIDAL?



### Behaviors to watch for:

- ♦ **Talking or joking about suicide** ("I wish I were dead." "I can't take it any more." "I'll just kill myself." "You'll miss me when I am gone") **Always take this seriously!**
- ♦ **Withdrawing** from things that they love to do.
- ♦ **Giving away things** that are valuable to them.
- ♦ **Isolating themselves** from family or staying away from people they enjoy spending time with.
- ♦ **Drawing or writing about death.**
- ♦ **Looking for or talking about ways to die.**

- ♦ **Being forgetful**; not being able to concentrate; not doing as well at work.
- ♦ **Coded language**, such as 'There's no point in trying anymore'.

### Feelings or moods to watch for:

- ♦ **Drastic mood changes**, easily angered or upset.
- ♦ Feeling as if they are a **burden** or that people will be better off without them.
- ♦ **Worrying and stressing** over everything.
- ♦ **Feeling hopeless**, depressed, or sad for some time.
- ♦ **A sudden improvement in mood** for no apparent reason. Sometimes when a person makes a plan to die, they suddenly seem to feel better, perhaps because they see an end to their pain.

*It's always best to be direct and ask if they are feeling suicidal.*

### Painful life events that can increase the risk of suicide:

- ♦ **Suffering a trauma** (injury or medical problem, sexual abuse/assault, victim of violence, legal problems).
- ♦ **Questioning sexual orientation** or being labeled gay, lesbian, bi-sexual or transgendered.
- ♦ **A recent loss** (moving, financial loss, divorce, relationship breakup, death of someone they love – even a celebrity).
- ♦ **Younger farmers losing a relationship**, such as divorce or death, can increase their risk for suicide.
- ♦ **Older farmers dealing** with significant health issues can increase their risk for suicide.

*Sometimes it's just one sign, but most often it's a combination of signs.*

Farming can be demanding, filled with uncertainties, financial pressures, and isolation. It's not uncommon for farmers and ranchers to experience emotional or mental pain, making it challenging to think clearly about their circumstances. The desire to alleviate this pain, combined with the unique challenges of the profession, increases the risk for suicide.

It's important to approach conversations about mental health with empathy and openness. Farmers and ranchers may not readily express their struggles, so taking the initiative to ask about their well-being is crucial. Be attentive to any signs of distress, and take all thoughts, threats, and behaviors related to suicide seriously.

## WHAT SHOULD I SAY TO MY LOVED ONE?

Here are a few ideas of what to say. You know your loved one best, so use what makes sense for you. **"I love you and want to make sure you stay safe."** In order to do that, we need to agree on a couple of things. I'm going to be asking you if you're okay, so let's decide how often I'm going to ask. You also need to agree to be honest when you answer the question." This agreement to communicate is an important first step.

**"I love you...I'm proud of you...you are so important to me...we're going to get through this together."**

Sometimes a person who is feeling depressed or anxious or desperate becomes convinced that other people would be better off without him or her. Keep the encouragement coming so your loved one hears how important he or she is to you and to other people.

**"You seem so sad (or withdrawn or angry or worried or...). What's going on?"** Identify a feeling and give your loved one a chance to talk about it. Their feelings won't always make sense to you. Sometimes the things we feel aren't logical. So don't lecture. Just listen. It does help to get their feelings out.

**"Are you thinking about killing yourself?...How would you do it?"** These are such difficult questions. Ask them anyway. The answers tell you what you need to know to keep your loved one safer. Is there something in your house your loved one is tempted to use to hurt or kill himself? Remove it. Can your loved one agree on a way to stay safe? If not, it may be time to go to the hospital.

**"Remember that time you felt so bad? You got through it and you can get through this."** It helps to be reminded that intense feelings pass, just like storm clouds. There is hope!





## WHY AM I FEELING THIS WAY?

When a loved one is in crisis, the family may experience intense feelings and need extra care and attention. This includes you.

- ♦ **Alone:** It's easy to think that you are the only one with this problem, especially because so many people avoid talking about mental health issues. You are not alone. **Reach out for help from family, friends, professionals, clergy, or a family support group.**



- ♦ **Guilt/Blame:** There is rarely just one reason for your loved one's distress. Blaming yourself or others is not useful. **Focus instead on looking for ways to help.**
- ♦ **Confused:** You may wonder how you didn't see this problem coming, but it's easy to confuse warning signs with one-off behaviors. **Educate yourself on suicide prevention and mental health. The more you know, the more you can help.**
- ♦ **Angry:** Feeling powerless about your loved one's crisis might make you feel angry with them or with the world in general. **A healthy way to communicate these strong feelings is to make it clear that you won't just stand by and do nothing while he or she struggles.** Let your loved one know you will do everything you can to keep them healthy and safe.
- ♦ **Scared:** You may wonder if your sense of alarm or panic will ever go away. You may wonder if your loved one will be safe, or if you'll ever feel safe again. You may fear that your family won't be the same again. These are all normal fears. **It will help to talk to someone.**

Going through this experience together may help you come out on the other side of this crisis a stronger family than you were before.

## WHAT SHOULD I DO TO HELP MY LOVED ONE?



**Do** listen to your loved one.

**Don't** argue about how your loved one is feeling, even if it is uncomfortable to hear.

**Do** ask about suicide. Use words like "suicide" or "kill yourself."

**Don't** ask if they are thinking of doing something "crazy" or "stupid" or "drastic." Say "suicide" when you mean "suicide."

**Don't** leave your loved one alone if he or she cannot agree on a way to remain safe.

**Do** assure them that the intensity of their feelings will pass.

**Don't** judge their feelings or lecture about how you think your loved one should feel. Remember that thoughts of suicide are a result of not being able to think clearly through their pain.

**Do** fill out My Safety Plan and remind him or her to follow the steps.

**Do** remove guns, poisons and alcohol from the home.

**Do** make sure your loved one takes medication as prescribed.

**Do** make sure your loved one keeps counseling appointments.

**Do** go to the hospital if things get worse.

**Do** ask your loved one if he or she is okay. Agree on how many times each day you will ask.

**Do** agree on a way to communicate. Talking, writing, texting - even drawing - are ways your loved one may communicate feelings and ask for help.

## WHAT IS SAFETY PLANNING?

Safety Planning is a process of taking the time to write down signals that your loved one is headed for emotional or mental distress, and the steps to take to stay healthy and safe.

Distress can lead to many unhealthy behaviors (arguments, violence, problems on the farm or ranch, self-injury, substance abuse, stealing, suicide). Having a plan to avoid those behaviors, and being prepared during stressful times can help you feel more confident and hopeful.



We have included a My Safety Plan card in this packet, and we encourage you to fill it out with your loved one. When one or both of you recognize the first signals of distress, put My Safety Plan steps into action.

The more thought put into the plan, the better it will work. Update it when you discover new signals, new coping skills, and new sources of support.

## MY SAFETY PLAN WORKSHEET

**Self-awareness:** Everybody has feelings, behaviors or thoughts that signal that a suicidal (or other) crisis is coming. Think about what yours are, and write them down.

**Action:** When you start to notice the presence of these feelings, behaviors, or thoughts, what are some things you can do to take care of yourself? Some examples are:





- HOBBIES / EXERCISE / GO OUTSIDE
- READ / TV / MUSIC
- DRAW / CREATE / DANCE / SING

- JOURNAL / MEDITATION / PRAYER
- EAT / BATHE / SHOWER / SELF-CARE
- WHAT HAS HELPED ME IN THE PAST?

### Friendly People/Places:

- ♦ If you are not able to help yourself feel better with the strategies above, who can help you to stay connected, or distract you from the crisis?
- ♦ It helps to recognize that some people who are not able to be emotionally supportive in a crisis (including children) may still be able to help keep those struggling thinking about other things.
- ♦ If not a specific person, perhaps there is a place (store, coffee shop, church, gym, etc.) where you can be around people.

### Emotional Support:

- ♦ If the crisis is still not relieved, with whom can you share these troubling feelings, and ask for emotional support?
- ♦ A crisis lifeline can be a great support (988).
- ♦ Include people who can help you stay safe.

**Turn to Professionals:** Therapists, doctors, and hospitals can help with all levels of stress, depression, and suicidal thoughts. An online source for FREE counseling for farmers and ranchers is [beyondtheweather.com](https://beyondtheweather.com)

**Yes! I can get through this!:** Write down the things that inspire you to stay safe and alive.





## Being Physically Active:

I enjoy these kinds of physical activity, and I will build them into my day in the following ways:

## Fueling My Body:

I will use these strategies to provide myself with adequate hydration and a wide variety of nutrients:

## Getting Restful Sleep:

By creating a sleep-friendly environment with these methods, I will set myself up for sleep success:

## Stress Management:

I will use these actions to manage my stress in a healthy and productive manner:

## Gratitude:

By actively practicing and expressing gratitude with these actions, I will improve my mental health and those around me:

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 988

## **Self-Awareness:**

These thoughts / feelings / behaviors tell me I'm in a bad place emotionally, or becoming dangerous to myself:

## **Action:**

When I notice this happening, I will take care of myself by doing these things:

## **Friendly People & Places**

I will go to these people or places to stay connected, or to distract myself (include contact info):

## **Emotional Support:**

I will share my feelings with these friends or relatives, and I will ask them for help (include contact info):

## **Turn to Professionals:**

Professionals from many backgrounds (medical, counseling, clergy) can help. I will contact these professionals for support:

## **Yes! I can get through this :**

If I find myself unable or unwilling to follow these steps, I will remind myself:

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 988



# Resources

## NATIONAL AND GENERAL RESOURCES

- ♦ **988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline:** A nationwide network of over 200 crisis centers that provides 24/7 service via a toll-free hotline with the number 9-8-8. It is available to anyone in any type of emotional distress.
- ♦ **Agrisafe Network:** Offers various resources for farmers and agricultural workers, including webinars, training, and health resources. Website: [www.agrisafe.org/](http://www.agrisafe.org/)
- ♦ **National Agricultural Workers' Health & Safety Center:** Provides information and resources on health and safety for agricultural workers. Website: [www.nawhsc.org/](http://www.nawhsc.org/)
- ♦ **Farm Aid:** Works to build a system of agriculture that values family farmers, good food, soil and water, and strong communities. They offer a hotline for crisis support: 1-800-FARM-AID (1-800-327-6243). Website: [www.farmaid.org](http://www.farmaid.org)
- ♦ **Rural Health Information Hub:** Offers a state-by-state guide to rural health resources and organizations, which can be particularly useful for accessing services specific to your state. Website: [www.ruralhealthinfo.org](http://www.ruralhealthinfo.org)

**Western Regional Agricultural Stress Assistance Program (WRASAP):** Provides access to resources to help farmers and ranchers in 13 Western states and 4 territories navigate the high levels of stress present in our agricultural communities. Website: [www.farmstress.us](http://www.farmstress.us)

## FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE AND COUNSELING

- ♦ **Farm Service Agency (FSA):** Offers loans and financial assistance for farmers. Local FSA offices can provide assistance tailored to specific regional needs. Website: [www.fsa.usda.gnu](http://www.fsa.usda.gnu)
- ♦ **Rural Financial Counseling:** Many states offer free or low-cost financial counseling services to farmers and rural residents, which can help manage financial stress.

## LEGAL ASSISTANCE

- ♦ **Farmers' Legal Action Group (FLAG):** Offers legal services and support to family farmers and their communities. Website: [www.flaginc.org](http://www.flaginc.org)



Call, Text, or Chat **988**  
for Free 24/7 Help and  
Resources