

What keeps us strong? Culture, country, law, story telling, language, art, music, dance, family, hunting, fishing, work, and sport.

Our people have strong culture. We are artists and storytellers, we are sporting legends and skilled hunters, we are musicians and dancers and uncles and aunties and grandmothers and grandfathers. Most of all we are teachers, and we are teaching our children to find their way in a modern world. Our kids need a guide to find their way ... they need to take our culture with them.... to bring both worlds into one. (Aboriginal Mental Health Worker)<sup>1</sup>

## Culture and suicide

As Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people we are more at risk of self harm or suicide because of our many experiences of loss and grief. We can feel disconnected from our culture, our land and our identity. We can feel alone and separated. Many of us also have trouble with drugs and alcohol, or violence which can cause us stress and sadness and lead to thoughts of suicide. Sometimes we harm ourselves as part of our culture and talking with people who know and understand our ways will be particularly important. This information will help us work out what we can do and who can help when we are worried about self harm or suicide.

*'There are times when I get down, I stop doing my hobbies like music and art, I think I'm no good and not worth anything, I tend to reach for a drink or a drug to escape... and there are times...when I've really thought about hurting myself.'*

*'Now I know what it is that gets me down and I try to reach out to family for help. My auntie watches out for me and helps me through the dark times.'*

<sup>1</sup> The quotes used throughout this Tool kit have been provided by Menzies School of Health Research with permission from the original sources

## Risk factors

### We are more at risk when:

- We are going through tough times
- Someone in our family or community has taken their life through suicide
- We are drinking too much alcohol or taking drugs
- We are sad or worried or have mental or physical illness
- We are alone
- We have harmed ourselves before

*'After my son passed away I just wanted to go to the cemetery all the time to be with him. I was drinking too much and fighting with my husband all the time. Then I realised my other children needed me too and I went to rehab and went back to my work. It was a long road but I'm getting there.'*





## Warning Signs

### Some warning signs of self harm or suicidal thoughts are:

- Talking or joking about death or suicide
- Showing we are thinking about death through our drawings, stories, songs, etc.
- Saying goodbye to people, giving away things, settling old or ongoing issues
- Increasing alcohol or drug use
- Not wanting to be around friends, family, or the community
- Risky or self destructive behaviour
- Talking of feeling hopeless, helpless or worthless
- Not taking care of ourselves and our appearance
- Suddenly feeling at peace (deciding that suicide will offer a way out)
- Being moody, sad, or angry
- Losing interest in things we usually enjoy
- Just not seeming to be ourselves

*'I was sitting inside all the time not going out, not sleeping, up all night. I even tried to overdose myself ....then what got me out of that was thinking about my kids who were there for me and thinking that I needed to make changes in my life. Now I am a health worker and I help my people and my community.'*

Many people think about suicide. Most will get through the hard times with the help and support of family, friends, health professionals and the community.

The following tips will help us know what to do, whether we are worried about ourselves or someone else.

## 1 Act now

If we are having suicidal thoughts, or someone we know is thinking of suicide, now is the time to do something. Getting help straight away could be what saves a life.

## 2 Have a yarn

Talking with someone who cares helps us feel less alone. It helps to yarn about how we are feeling.

*'I was smoking a lot of gunja and fighting with family all the time. They didn't understand. One day my friends were teasing me with rumours about my boyfriend. I told them I was going to kill myself and I ran off. The health worker ran after me and after I came back all the family were worried and crying. When I sat down with the health worker and my auntie and my grandmother it didn't seem so bad and I didn't feel so alone.'*

## 3 Share thoughts of suicide

Asking the question is the only way we can really know if a person is thinking about suicide. Talking about it will not put the idea into someone's head. Things can seem a lot better after we have spoken about our problems.

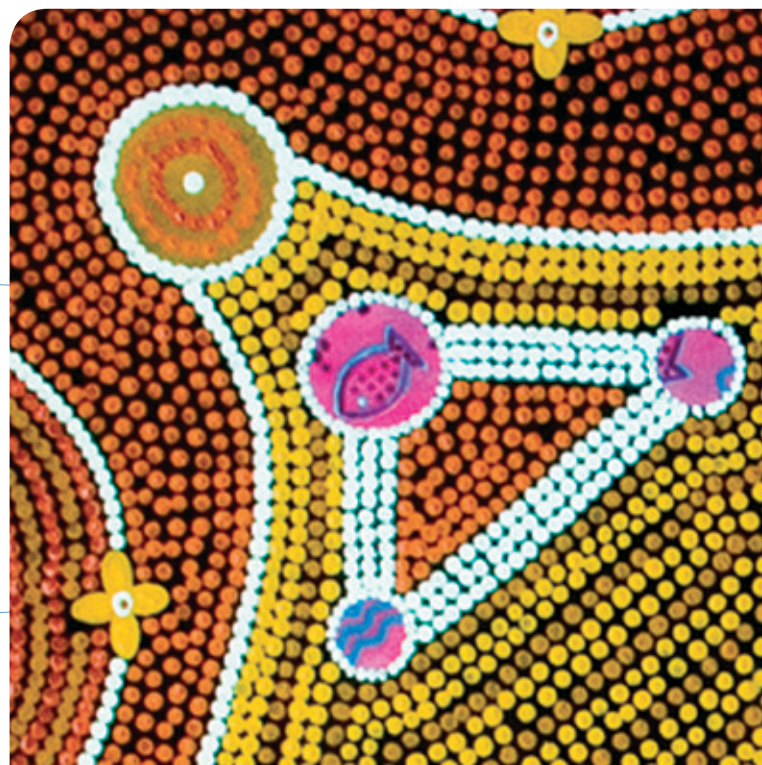
*'Sometimes I feel really alone, even when I am with my family and my friends. I cover up how I'm feeling and it's hard for others to know that there is anything wrong. It was only when I went to the health worker that I found someone I could talk to.'*

## 4 Keep safe

The more planning a person has done toward self harm or suicide, the more help they need. If the answer to any of the following questions is yes, there is greater risk of self harm or suicide:

- Access to ways to self harm (drugs, guns, knives, etc.)?
- Previous attempts at self harm or suicide?
- Thoughts about how to do it?
- Thoughts about when to do it?
- Not many people around for support?

If the answer is yes to any of the risks listed above, we must do whatever we can to keep ourselves or the person we are worried about safe. If possible and without putting ourselves in danger, we need to remove any items or objects (knives, guns, car keys, medications) that can be used for self harm or suicide. Then, TAKE ACTION and put a safety plan in place.



## 5 Take action

Do not keep thoughts of self harm or suicide a secret. Other people can help such as:

- Family and friends
- An Elder or other community member
- Doctor, Counsellor, Psychologist, Social Worker or any other health professional
- Mental Health service providers
- Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Health Service or any other local Health Centre
- Support Groups
- Religious Ministers
- School counsellors, youth group leaders, sports coaches etc.

*'I was worried about getting access to my kids and fighting with their mother. I was worried about money and kept reaching for a drink and drugs to escape. I even thought about harming myself. Now I always go to my nephews place if I feel like that. We talk and we play music. I want my kids to learn about their culture and spend time on their country out bush – and I want to be around to teach them.'*

## 6 Make a safe plan

We need to make a plan to keep ourselves or others safe from thoughts of self harm and suicide. Having a clear safe plan is important to help us through step by step when we are having thoughts of suicide. We need to think carefully about each step in this safe plan to make sure that it will work for us. It might mean:

- That we have someone we trust to contact when we are having dangerous thoughts who can stay with us and support us
- That we have a plan for steps and actions to take with our support person to ensure our safety
- That we might make an appointment with a support service or professional for extra support

If we cannot put a safe plan in place the following emergency services will help.





## Places to go for help now:

Call Lifeline's 24 hour telephone crisis support service on 13 11 14

### Useful resources

- Visit Lifeline's website to access information and resources [www.lifeline.org.au](http://www.lifeline.org.au)
- Your local Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Health Service
- Local or regional Mental Health service providers
- Aboriginal HealthInfoNet - 'one-stop info-shop' that aims to contribute to 'closing the gap' in health between Indigenous and other Australians by informing practice and policy in Indigenous health by making research and other knowledge readily accessible  
[www.healthinonet.ecu.edu.au](http://www.healthinonet.ecu.edu.au)
- Beyondblue national depression initiative  
[www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au)
- Blue pages online depression support  
[www.bluepages.anu.edu.au](http://www.bluepages.anu.edu.au)

## Emergency services

Ring the Police or Ambulance on 000 or go to the local Hospital Emergency Department when life is in danger.



For 24 hour telephone crisis support call 13 11 14  
For more information visit [www.lifeline.org.au](http://www.lifeline.org.au)  
To donate call 1 800 800 768

This Tool Kit has been produced by the Lifeline Information Service as a public service. You are welcome to reproduce it without alteration and with acknowledgement of Lifeline. We invite your feedback and comments at [infoservice@lifeline.org.au](mailto:infoservice@lifeline.org.au)

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## Acknowledgements:



**primesuper**

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Prime Super is the proud sponsor of the Lifeline Information Service – your mental health and self-help resource.

Prime Super is Australia's only nationally operating super fund dedicated to rural and regional Australia.

For more information on Prime Super, please ring 1800 675 839 or visit their website [www.primesuper.com.au](http://www.primesuper.com.au)

Lifeline and Prime Super are working in partnership to promote mental health awareness, help-seeking and suicide prevention.



This tool kit was developed with content input and advice from the Aboriginal and Islander Mental Health Initiative at Menzies School of Health Research – AIMHI/[Menzies.edu.au](http://Menzies.edu.au)

Ring or go to your local Mental Health Team (see Community Health Centres in your White Pages).

Ring or go to your local doctor, Aboriginal Health Worker or non-Indigenous health professional.