

what to do after a loved ones suicide attempt



**a guide for practicing loving,
supportive, non-carceral, †
non-directive care**

CREATED BY PROJECT LETS

**express empathy. avoid
anger, guilt, blame, + shame.**

Now is the time to communicate your love. If this is a person we love deeply or are in relationship with, we can become personally impacted with their decision to attempt suicide. We may be navigating different, competing emotions during this time – our love for this person, our shock, our fear, confusion around why they did it and what was going on for them, or defensiveness around why we weren't "enough" for them to want to be alive. We encourage folks to find their own support system to deal with complicated emotions, and work to **not** seek support from, become angry with, blame, or shame the attempt survivor. Those are feelings we can process with other people. The priority with the attempt survivor is expressing empathy, understanding, love, and a space for them to process complex emotions.

ASK how you can support them in this moment.



Push back on your urgent, savior impulses to rush in and fix everything and problem solve and make it all better. We want to defer to the attempt survivor, and offer support that is needed or desired in this moment.

If they are not sure what could be useful/helpful and you have ideas, ask if you can offer suggestions.

Some ideas: talking it out, water, food that they like a lot, warm snuggles, a walk in the sun, music, a sleepover, exploring healing options, helping pause obligations + responsibilities, grocery shopping

**Don't pretend it didn't happen.
Avoid becoming so fearful of not
saying the right thing that you
end up saying nothing at all.**

Sometimes when something is really difficult or sad or emotionally charged, we know we should act (say or do something)– but we become frozen by the fear of not knowing what to say or do. So we try to pretend it didn't happen, or we say nothing at all.

This is almost always worse, and prioritizes your feelings of discomfort and uncertainty over offering care and support to a person you love going through an incredibly difficult experience.

If we don't know what to say, we can say just that! *"Thank you so much for telling me. I am really glad you trusted me with that. I honestly don't know what to say right now, but I am here and I want to be as supportive to you as I can. Is there anything you need right now? I can drop off food or order you something if you'd like?"*

Listen, validate, be present.



Be there to listen and validate their experience as they share with you. Validate how fucked up the forces are that have harmed them and pushed them into this place. Express solidarity if you have been harmed by similar forces.

Don't make excuses for why you can't be supportive. Just be supportive. If you truly need to attend to your own needs, communicate that while also communicating that you will return. Do not make someone feel abandoned when they are in one of the most difficult places imaginable.

Do not ask questions about how they attempted.



Be very conscious of your tone and try not to sound investigative. Try to avoid sounding aloof in the effort to not sound alarmist. Find the balance between demonstrating your understanding of the urgency of the situation, and also not putting your stress on to them. Some people may want to talk about specific details or aspects of their attempt, but this should come from the person. You can also hold space for this by saying, *"If you'd like to share about what happened during your attempt, I want you to know I'm here to listen and process that with you. But absolutely no pressure. You don't need to share that information with me or anyone if you're not comfortable doing so."*

Practice community care. And when appropriate, talk about diversifying supports.

Community means many people coming together. This is the type of moment when someone needs their community to rally around them, and to do their best to actually be supportive on the person's terms. That being said, do not call in people the person didn't ask you to call. They define who their community is.

This is what community care looks like, and the more we cultivate it the more it will come back around and help you when you're in crisis too. Make the time. The time will be made for you in the future.



Do not assume one method of healing is better than others. Recognize that the mental health system can make people more suicidal.



Research shows that individuals who are placed on involuntary psychiatric holds (or folks who are psychiatrically incarcerated) have an **increased** risk of suicide after leaving the hospital. Let us work to unlearn the myth that the mental health system offers the caring support, healing, and resources that individuals need after a suicide attempt. Ask the person what type of healing or resources they may be interested in. Maybe it's therapy or medication. Maybe it's seeing a holistic healer or somatics practitioner. Maybe it's getting a tarot reading or getting their bones thrown. Maybe it's a change of environment or being by the ocean. Maybe it's seeing a medium or psychic. Maybe it's finding a peer respite house. Avoid the urge to assume that the mental health system knows best- **and give choices.**

**Every attempt survivor
will have a different
experience. Do not
generalize.**

Even if we have personal experiences with suicide, everyone's experience will be different. It's best to ask questions and defer to the individual, rather than make assumptions based your lived experience or any one resource.

