

HOW SHOULD I DEAL WITH SUICIDAL THOUGHTS DURING COVID-19?

The COVID-19 crisis and lockdown in South Africa is causing a lot of stress for many people. We are living in very unusual times.

Mothers may be struggling because

- They or their partners or family members cannot work and they may be scared that there is no money coming in. There may be a shortage of basics and food.
- They may be coming off alcohol, drugs or cigarettes. They may be using alcohol or drugs to try and help with their feelings, even though the drugs and alcohol make things worse.
- They may be stuck at home with difficult or abusive family members.

It is normal to feel scared, lonely, frustrated, sad or hopeless during this time.

Some mothers are feeling that their problems and emotional suffering feel too much for them to manage. Some mothers wish their lives could be over and some think about suicide. Do you (or someone you know):

- Feel sad and hopeless most of the time?
- Not enjoy anything anymore?
- Want to be left alone?
- See no way out of your situation?
- Think things will be better if you are not around?

If you have thoughts like these, or if you plan to hurt yourself, or are already hurting yourself, you can get help. There are options to deal with many problems you have and to deal with the emotional pain. It often helps just to talk over your thoughts and situation.

1. Firstly, remember this is how you are feeling NOW, at this time. These thoughts and feelings will not last forever. This bad time WILL pass.
2. It is very important to reach out and talk to someone who can help you. Do not keep it inside. Do not try to do it alone.
3. If you are unsure what to do or who to turn to, you could tell someone how you feel, and let them help you find ways to manage your feelings.
 - call one of the helplines below
 - speak to a health worker like a nurse, doctor, psychologist, psychiatrist
 - reach out to a supportive family member, friend or community member who understands you. Choose who you talk to carefully. Do not confide in someone who is going to make you feel worse by not taking you seriously.
4. It is very important that you get **professional help** from a health worker if
 - you have had negative thoughts and feelings for most days over a two-week period, or
 - you feel that you cannot keep yourself safe

Mental healthcare is an essential service during the lockdown period. Mental health services in government health services and the private sector are still open. The mental health professional should listen to you and help you to decide on the best course of action. Actions can be going to a hospital or clinic, medication, or counselling/therapy.

During COVID-19, many psychiatrists, psychologists and counsellors have switched to doing counselling online or over the phone. So just because you are locked down does not mean that you cannot get professional help.

What else may help?

Although you may have no energy, and just feel like lying in bed, try and keep busy. This may feel hard to do, but it does help. Do whatever works for you in your situation – watch a movie, do some exercise, do housework, cook, play with your kids. Develop a daily routine and limit news and social media content that may trigger negative thoughts and feelings.

If you can, help others. There are so many people in need right now, and no matter how bad your situation is, you probably have some way in which you can help other people. This helps you to feel that you are not alone, and that you are part of a larger community. We all need each other during this time.

Call a helpline. These counsellors have the skills to help people who feel suicidal.

Helplines (This is a busy time. Keep trying if you don't get through first time)

- SADAG Suicide Helpline: Phone 0800 567 567 or sms (please call me) 31393.

You can call SADAG toll-free 7 days a week from 8am to 8pm.

You can also reach out to SADAG on Facebook.

- Lifeline South Africa: Phone 0861 322 322. This toll free line operates 24 hours a day/ 7 days a week.

For more info and helplines visit www.messagesformothers.co.za or www.pmhp.za.org