

Learning to Live with a Loved One's Chronic Suicidality

A popular belief is that a suicide crisis is episodic: a person has suicidal thoughts, an intervention occurs, the person gets treatment, and the crisis is resolved within days or weeks. It does happen this way, however, for some people suicidal thoughts do not go away; they become a chronic, constant part of daily life.

Who and Why?

Chronic suicidal thoughts can occur in junction with a variety of mental illnesses, particularly borderline personality disorder and depression, or with no diagnosed illness at all. Survivors of complex trauma, defined as recurrent and inescapable traumatic experiences, those living with complex post-traumatic stress disorder, and those suffering from conditions that cause chronic physical pain may also be at greater risk for chronic suicidal ideation.



Intense, ongoing psychological pain often drives chronic suicidality. However, for those who are vulnerable to them, even minor life challenges or difficulties can intensify their suicidal thoughts. For some people, chronic suicidal ideation may provide a form of escapism and relief. Some experts refer to "suicide fantasy as life-sustaining recourse" which suggests that, for some people, there is

comfort in the possibility of death by suicide if the pain of life gets to be too much. ([When Suicidal Thoughts Do Not Go Away: Speaking of Suicide](#)).

How They Harm

Even if chronic suicidality is credited as providing some relief, chronic suicidal thoughts still pose considerable risk. Constantly thinking about suicide may normalize and familiarize it which can weaken inhibitions and fears about it. Chronic suicidal thoughts typically mask an underlying concern, like past trauma, mental illness, or a significant loss, that needs to be addressed.

When to Take Action

Understanding when the chronic suicidal thoughts pose danger and when they do not is an integral part of managing your loved one's condition. Every thought of suicide does not warrant an emergency with someone who has chronic suicidality. Danger occurs when suicidal thoughts intensify, and the person has the intention to imminently act upon them. This is a time to take immediate action to ensure their safety.

If they are simply expressing the same thoughts of suicide they have previously had, you can support them by engaging in a compassionate conversation, encouraging use of coping strategies, and utilizing established resources.

Bottom line though, if you are unsure about what the level of risk is, it's better to overreact than underreact. Intervene and don't leave your loved one alone if you have concerns about their immediate safety.

Caregiving:

Caring for someone who experiences chronic suicidality can be exhausting. You cannot "self-care" yourself completely out of the emotional and mental toil from this type of caregiving. However, there are actions you can put in place to foster as much resilience as possible.

1. **Empower yourself with knowledge.** Educate yourself about the most effective treatment options and support opportunities to develop a personalized approach for management of chronic suicidal thoughts.
2. **Build a village of support.** Create a network of friends, family and care providers who can be relied upon during an acute crisis and for long-term assistance managing the day-to-day challenges. Be sure to include people who are there *just for you*; whose main goal is to support only you.
3. **Develop a personalized plan.** There is no single blueprint for ongoing management of chronic suicidal thoughts that works for everyone. Explore what interventions and support work best for you and your loved one. Understand their triggers and have plans in place to address those as they occur. Communicate those plans to your village of support.
4. **Generate goodness and gratitude.** It can be hard to maintain a positive outlook when dealing with a loved one's chronic suicidality. Being pragmatic and realistic about the challenges is helpful. However, focusing too much on the difficulties can create siloed negativity. Actively seek out opportunities that deposit good energy into your emotional bank. Identify daily micro-moments that you are grateful for.
5. **Keep yourself in sight.** Being a compassionate caregiver to someone struggling with a chronic condition is a good thing; a trait to be proud of. However, it's not uncommon that this type of caregiving can cause challenges maintaining a sense of self. Caring for someone experiencing chronic suicidal thoughts can compromise your ability to separate yourself from them. Your self-identity may become tied to their chronic suicidality and your daily life activities may revolve around them. In times of acute crisis, this is necessary to ensure their safety. However, when no imminent danger exists, put intentional effort into your own needs, aspirations, and goals. This can help create and sustain strength and energy to provide ongoing support to your loved one.

Resources

[When Suicidal Thoughts Do Not Go Away: Speaking of Suicide](#)

[Self-Care When Caring for A Loved One with Mental Illness \(americanbehavioralclinics.com\)](#)

[How to Live with Chronic Suicidality as a Complex Trauma Survivor \(themighty.com\)](#)

1. [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#): Dial 988 – Provides 24/7 support to anyone in suicide crisis or emotional distress.
2. [speakingofsuicide.com](#): Provides support for suicidal individuals and their loved ones, survivors, mental health professionals and others who care.

**For more information, tools, resources, or app information, call your
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