

A FIELD GUIDE FOR MEN

Sit With Him

How to be there for a man who wants to die

Jake McCluskey

You noticed something. A text that didn't sit right. A word he used that he's never used before. Maybe he told you straight out, and now you can't unhear it. Your stomach is somewhere around your knees and you're reading this on your phone trying to figure out what to do in the next ten minutes.

You don't need to be a counselor. You don't need the right words. You need to stay, ask the hard question, and get him to people who are trained for this. That's the whole job. Not fixing him. Not saving him. Staying, and getting him help.

This guide won't make you an expert by the time you finish it. It'll give you the next right move, and the one after that. Read the crisis numbers below first. Then keep reading.

Right now: if he is in immediate danger, call 911. 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, call or text 988, any time. Veterans, dial 988 then press 1, or text 838255. You do not have to be enrolled in VA benefits or health care. Do not carry this alone tonight.

Save that number in your phone before you do anything else. Not his phone. Yours.

1. Take it seriously. Don't panic.

If a man tells you he wants to die, or if what you're seeing has you scared enough to be reading this, believe it. Don't tell yourself he's just venting. Don't wait for a clearer sign. You already have the sign.

Panic doesn't help him and it won't help you make good decisions. Your job in the next few minutes isn't to solve his life. It's to get a breath, find him or call him, and start the next step. Slow your own hands down. He needs you steady more than he needs you fast.

2. Ask him straight.

This is the part men skip because it feels dangerous. It isn't. Asking a man directly whether he's thinking about killing himself does not plant the idea. It doesn't give him permission. What it does is tell him someone finally sees what he's carrying, and that he doesn't have to hide it from you.

Ask it plainly. "Are you thinking about killing yourself." Not "you're not thinking about doing anything crazy, are you." Not a joke to soften it. The plain question, asked like you mean it, because you do.

If he says yes, don't flinch and don't argue with him about it. Just say thank you for telling me. Then move to the next step.

3. Listen. Don't preach, don't argue.

He is not asking you for a sermon and he is not asking you for a debate. He's told you the worst thing he's carrying, or you found out some other way, and now he's watching to see what you do with it.

Let him talk. Don't fill the silence with your own fear. Don't rush to explain why he's wrong to feel this way. Pain isn't an argument you win. You're not there to correct his theology in the moment or convince him of anything. You're there to hear him.

Don't ask why, over and over, like there's one clean answer waiting. There usually isn't. A man doesn't get to this place from one thing. Job, marriage, money, a war he never talks about, a body that's failing him, years of nobody asking, it stacks. You don't need the whole list tonight. You need him talking to you instead of alone with it.

4. Don't leave him alone. Get danger out of reach, without a lecture.

If he is willing, stay with him, or get someone else there who can. Don't leave a man alone in this state if you can help it. If you have to leave, don't leave him without a plan for who's coming next.

If there's anything in reach that he could use to hurt himself, get it out of the house, or get him out of the house. Ask a friend to hold onto it for a while. You don't owe him a debate about this and you don't need to explain every reason. "Let's get this out of the house tonight" is enough. Time and distance save lives. A man in crisis is often only in real danger for a window, not forever. Widen the window.

5. Get him to real help.

You are not the last line here, and you were never supposed to be. Get him connected to people trained for this. Call 988 with him, or hand him the phone and stay next to him while he does it. If he won't call, you call, and tell them what's happening. If he's in immediate danger, call 911 or get him to an emergency room. Don't wait for a better moment. This is the moment.

If he has a counselor, a pastor, a doctor, loop them in. If he's a veteran, the Veterans Crisis Line is built for exactly this and he doesn't need to have his VA paperwork in order to use it. Getting him to help isn't giving up on him. It's the most loyal thing you can do. You caring about him and him needing more than you can give are both true at once.

6. What NOT to say.

Don't tell him to snap out of it. Don't tell him he has so much to live for, like his own eyes haven't seen that and it isn't enough right now. Don't quote a verse at him like a closing

argument. Don't make him promise you he won't do it and treat that promise like it fixes anything. Don't say you'll keep this a secret. You can't, and you shouldn't. Secrecy is what almost kills men. Tell him plainly: I love you too much to sit on this alone. I'm getting you help.

Above everything, don't shame him. He is not weak. He is not a coward. He is not failing God. Paul himself wrote, "we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life" (2 Corinthians 1:8). An apostle said that about himself. A man who is suicidal is a man in unbearable pain, not a man with a character defect. Nothing about needing help disqualifies him from anything, least of all from God.

7. The hope you can offer that isn't a platitude.

Here's what's actually true, not the greeting-card version. God is close to a man in this condition, not far from him. "The LORD is near to the brokenhearted And saves those who are crushed in spirit" (Psalm 34:18). Near, not disgusted. Near, not disappointed.

And if he's a believer, tell him this straight: his standing with God was never hanging by his own strength to hold on. It never hung on how well he was holding it together, and it isn't hanging on this crisis either. Nothing, not this, not the thoughts he's ashamed of, not a bad night, gets to separate him from what Christ already secured for him. "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38-39). That's not a threat, and it isn't a technicality he has to be careful not to break. It's the floor under him when everything else gave way. And a God whose grip on him is that strong is not a God who's finished with him tonight.

You don't have to carry this weight alone, and neither does he. "Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2). That's not just a verse for you. Say it to him. Tell him you're not asking him to carry this by himself anymore, and you're not going to either.

8. After: stay in his life.

Getting him through tonight isn't the finish line. Men fall through the cracks in the weeks after a crisis, right when everyone else assumes the danger passed. Check on him tomorrow. Check on him next week. Show up, not just text. Ask him straight again if you need to, it's still not dangerous to ask.

Don't treat him differently now like he's fragile or like this defines him. Keep being his friend, not his case manager. The steadiest thing you can give a man after a night like this is the

same relationship you had before, plus one thing added: he now knows you'll stay when it's bad. Don't let that fade once the fear in you does.

The verses to have ready

- **Psalm 34:18** "The LORD is near to the brokenhearted And saves those who are crushed in spirit."
- **Matthew 11:28** "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest."
- **Romans 8:38-39** "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."
- **Galatians 6:2** "Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ."

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