

STAYING ALIVE

You did not deserve to be abused and you do not deserve any of the suffering that has gone with it. You deserve a fulfilling, happy life.

Suicide is a taboo subject. People don't usually want to talk about it. But many people who've suffered abuse as children, think about it, plan it, even attempt it. Why?

When you think about it childhood abuse can have so many harmful effects it's no wonder many survivors think about killing themselves. If you're one of them see if any of the following seems true for you:

- **You feel very depressed, like there's no point in living.**
- **You may feel like you can never get anything right, and that you're no use to anyone.**
- **The future might seem completely hopeless.**
- **You may feel like the only way to blot out the pain you are feeling is to end it all.**
- **You may not really want to die, but you want oblivion, a place where there's no more pain.**

Feeling suicidal can occur at different stages of recovery. Sometimes it happens when you start remembering the abuse and trying to come to terms with what happened. At this point you may experience a lot of emotional pain and chaos. Then as you start recovering you may feel despair thinking of the long road that lies ahead. But the feelings can often come back later on if you uncover memories, or even when you achieve what seems like a positive breakthrough.

What to do if you feel like killing yourself

- **Don't do it! OK, this is easy to say. But the tragedy is that a small number of survivors do kill themselves. This is not only tragic in itself, but also because experience shows us that, over time, and with support, the pain gets less. You deserve to live.**
- **Get help and support. Talk to the people you trust about how you are feeling. Suicide, like abuse, occurs in isolation. Try to reach out to those you trust.**
- **Consider talking to your GP. Suicidal feelings can be related to depression. People who have been abused often experience bouts of depression. These days doctors regard depression as a treatable illness with anti-depressant medication. Some survivors have found**

anti-depressants useful in lifting their mood. They're not the answer to dealing with abuse issues but they may get you over a rough patch.

- **Decide what structure you need to stay safe. Do you need to be around someone all the time? Do you need to be able to contact someone by phone 24 hours per day? Are there trusted people around you who can do these things for you, and are they willing to do it?**
- **Remember the Samaritans are available 24 hours per day by phone, and sometimes can even offer face to face support. They are usually accepting, don't judge, and are experienced at listening to people who feel despairing.**
- **If you feel you need a short spell in hospital to stay safe you'll probably have to consult your GP or another health professional. Consulting such people can be useful but you should be fully informed about the power they possess. People feeling suicidal are usually offered a bed on a psychiatric ward if there is no additional help to offer them in their own home. But be aware that some professionals also have the power to detain you against your will if you decide you don't want to go into hospital. If two doctors say you are a danger to yourself and suffering from a mental disorder, and a social worker agrees, you can be detained against your will on a psychiatric ward. As a child you may already have had the experience of something bad being done to you against your will, so the thought that you may be forced into doing something you don't want to do may be scary. If you feel you do not want to get involved with GP's or other mental health professionals try to take a friend or ally along with you to support you and help you argue for what you want.**
- **Try to avoid using alcohol or non-prescribed drugs. If you're already feeling low, these will only make you feel worse.**
- **Try to make an agreement with someone about what you'll do if you start to feel suicidal. This person could be a trusted friend or a therapist/counsellor. Your agreement with them might include:**
 - **Who you will ring.**
 - **Where you will go to e.g., a safe place to spend the night.**
 - **What measures you will take to reduce your distress e.g., relaxation, medication etc.**

Make a list of reasons for living. It may seem difficult. But write down anything that comes to mind. Survivors often come up with many reasons for living like:

- I won't let the abuser win.
 - I want to be here for my friends/family/lover.
 - If I can stick with it the pain will get less.
- **Try to imagine where the pain has reduced. Again this is hard to do if you feel down. Try to imagine what life will be like in a month's time, in a year's time, three year's time, all the time with you recovering from the effects of the abuse, the pain reducing and you getting more of what you want from life.**
 - **If you're in therapy, counselling, or a support group try to make a plan with them about what you'll do between sessions and make a commitment to come to the next session.**
 - **If you're in the process of exploring your abuse in therapy, counselling or a group, decide whether you need to take a break and push through the pain – others might need to take a break.**
 - **Finally, remember that you deserve to live.**