

## Help, if you need it:

### **Someone to talk to:**

Careline is Alaska's free and confidential 24/7 statewide suicide prevention and emotional support line.

Call anytime in a crisis, if you feel overwhelmed, or to ask how best to support someone you care about:

Statewide: 877-266-4357 (HELP)  
or text 4help to 839863, 3-11 p.m.  
Tuesday-Saturday.

[www.carelinealaska.com](http://www.carelinealaska.com)

### **Help understanding, and ideas on how to help:**

[lifelineforattemptsurvivors.org](http://lifelineforattemptsurvivors.org)  
Lifeline has stories from people who've been there.

### **Mental illness information and support:**

NAMI ([www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org)) is a national organization for people living with mental illness, and for their families. NAMI in Alaska offers referrals, support groups, and more.

Anchorage: 272-0227  
Statewide: 844-907-1959 (toll-free)

### **Information on self-harm:**

[www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/selfharm.html](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/selfharm.html)

The U.S. National Library of Medicine has information on many health topics.



Alaska Division of Behavioral Health  
[www.hss.state.ak.us/dbh](http://www.hss.state.ak.us/dbh)

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Many thanks to NAMI in Alaska members  
and NAMI, [www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org).



Supporting  
someone  
after  
self-harm  
or a suicide  
attempt

Understanding the  
difference, and how  
you can help.

Need help now?  
Call Careline  
877-266-HELP (4357)

You're not alone.

There are support groups and care for people who are struggling AND for those who care about them. Please reach out for help.

**People do recover.**

## Understanding self-harm

When people hurt themselves, it can be scary for both those who are injured and for their loved ones.

**Suicide attempts** are often a result of someone hurting so badly he or she can't think straight. People can have a 'brain attack' the way they can have a heart attack. Just because someone wants relief in the moment or can't see a way out of overwhelming pain doesn't mean actually wanting to end his or her life.

After a suicide attempt, you both may feel

- exhausted
- alone
- embarrassed or ashamed
- scared and overwhelmed

These and more are all natural feelings. It may be helpful to think of a mental health crisis like a physical one — processing and healing will take time.

**Self-harm is not necessarily a suicide attempt.** Some forms of self-harm, such as cutting or eating disorders, are not suicidal. People often don't think of these actions as damaging themselves, and don't understand they can have long-term health consequences.

## Why do people self-harm?

People may self-harm for...

- stress relief -- a way to deal with intense, difficult emotions.
- a way to feel alive, or just plain feel. The body's natural chemical response to pain can give an endorphin rush, like a "runner's high" from hard exercise.
- a way to fit in. Experiencing peer-pressure is very different from attempting to end one's life. However, self-injury can be accidentally life-threatening, and may (or may not) lead to more extreme self-harm over time.

If someone regularly self-harms and thinks the behavior is under control, you and the injured person may have very different emotions. It will be important to listen and learn to help you understand. Be careful to share your feelings at a time and in a way that they're likely to be heard. As upset as you may be, you don't want to shut your loved one down. Talking to a professional separately can be very helpful for coping with your own feelings.

**Self-harm and suicide attempts are often — though not always — impulsive acts.**

**What both have in common is that there are healthier ways to cope with overwhelming stress or pain, feel alive and fit in.**

## Recovering from a suicide attempt or other self-harm

Recovery, like reasons for self-injury, is different for everyone. Usually, though, it includes:

1. **Follow-up care**, such as therapy and support groups. If a medication is too expensive; ask about a generic or call 211.
2. **Healthy routine.** Healthy meals, therapy, exercise, enough sleep at the same time each day... all these things help.
3. **Support system.** People who can help with cooking, company, rides to appointments, etc.
4. **Safety.** Remove or lock up ways to hurt oneself (guns, medicines, sharp objects etc.) until the person feels better. This is a very important step. A suicidal person should keep on hand a written plan in case of harmful thoughts. It could be as simple as "Call my doctor or Careline" and those phone numbers.
5. **Comfort.** Support groups, a hobby, volunteering, art, writing, a good movie, good food, music, a pet... all can help a person feel better. Variety is good. The person can start with one, and add more as she or he is ready.

**People do recover from mental health crises and go on to thrive.**

## You can help support recovery.

- **Help build healthy habits.** Take walks, share meals, do puzzles, laugh together, be kind and positive.
- **Take care of yourself.** Self-care allows you to better help those near to your heart and avoid burnout. And when you take steps to be healthy, like attending support groups and getting rest and exercise, you're a good role model.
- **Understand mental illness** is an illness, like cancer. Some people die from cancer and some people die from depression or other mental illnesses. It doesn't make them weak or a bad person, and it's not your fault.  
  
There are no guarantees, but there are treatments and there is hope.
- **Keep some perspective.** You are ultimately not responsible for another person's health or choices.  
  
We can't walk another person's path, but we can offer comfort and support.
- **Have patience.** Recovery looks different for different people, and will take time.