

## How We R.E.A.C.H. Coaching Tool

As we face the tragedy of suicide in our nation, we must *reach* beyond what we have done before. We must change the way we think about, talk about and address emotional pain and suffering. **Suicide is preventable – but only if we empower ourselves with the knowledge, tools and resources we need.**

**REACH** is for *everyone*. The How We R.E.A.C.H. Coaching Tool described below uses the mnemonic **R.E.A.C.H.** to provide guidance to *everyone* – helping individuals who are offering support to a loved one who is struggling *and* helping those who are struggling themselves seek support. It was developed to help us all learn how to *reach*.

**REACH** is about preventing suicide. The How We R.E.A.C.H. Coaching Tool teaches us how to *reach* to help someone in need and it teaches us how to *reach* to help ourselves. By learning together, we will prevent suicide.

### *When we REACH to those in need, we:*

- R – Reach** out and ask, “How are you...*really*?” Listen and offer hope.
- E – Engage** them about possible risk factors and changes in their life to better understand their pain.
- A – Attend** to their safety. Unless you are concerned about your safety, stay with them.
- C – Connect** them to resources such as supportive friends and family, professionals or a crisis line.
- H – Help** them make and maintain a plan to stay safe. Encourage them to share it with others.

### *When we REACH because we are hurting, we:*

- R – Reach** to a loved one or someone we trust. Don’t be afraid to *reach* out – *now*.
- E – Engage** those we trust and discuss life changes and risk factors that are contributing to our pain.
- A – Attend** to our safety and surroundings. Contact someone who can stay with us if we are worried about ourselves.
- C – Connect** with family, friends or appropriate professionals. Contact a crisis line. Be as honest as we can so they can help.
- H – Help** others understand how they can help us stay safe. Share a safety plan if we have one.

### **When we REACH, we will prevent suicide.**

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*If you are worried about yourself or someone you love, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255 (Press 1 if you are a Veteran, Service member or family member) The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is a free resource that’s available to anyone. Alternately, text TALK to 741741 to text with a trained crisis counselor from the Crisis Text Line for free, 24/7.*

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## ***When we REACH to those in need, we:***

***R – Reach out and ask, “How are you...really?” Listen and offer hope.***

**Ask the person directly about their feelings, even though you may feel awkward.** There is no perfect thing to say. This is difficult for all of us.

- Listen to what the person has to say and take it seriously. Just talking to someone who really cares can make a big difference to a person who feels hopeless.
- A suicidal or severely depressed person may not have the energy or motivation to find help. If the person doesn't feel able to consult a doctor or mental health professional, you can offer to help find a provider and/or explore other options for care and support such as a crisis center, a support group, someone from the individual's faith community or another trusted person.
- You can offer support and share what has helped you — but remember you are not a mental health professional and it is important to bring in additional resources and support if it becomes clear that the individual is considering self-harm. You can always contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at (800) 273–8255 (Press 1 if you are a Veteran or Service member or family member) to speak with someone who can provide you with guidance.

***E – Engage them about possible risk factors and changes in their life to better understand their pain.***

**Talk to them about challenges and struggles they are currently experiencing or have experienced in their lives. Possible risk factors to listen for include:**

- Prior suicide attempts
- Chronic health concerns
- Chronic pain
- A history of mental illness
- Substance use and misuse challenges
- Access to lethal means
- Overall sense of hopelessness
- Legal or financial challenges
- Relationship difficulties
- Prior trauma
- Adverse childhood experiences
- Having a family member who died by suicide
- Sleep problems (whether too much or too little)
- Recent loss such as the death of a loved one, divorce or loss of job
- Poor quality of life or other social determinants of health (such as housing insecurity, food insecurity, lack of support systems, discrimination, social stress and lack of access to health care)

**Listen and provide support. Offer hope and your willingness to help them find solutions that work for them.**

***A – Attend to their safety. Unless you are concerned about your safety, stay with them.***

**Ask directly if the person is having thoughts of suicide and if the individual has a plan, a date and/or a time.**

- Do not leave the individual alone, particularly if they have a plan and the means for suicide. Get professional help. Call 911 or the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at (800) 273–8255 (Press 1 if you are a Veteran, Service member or family member) immediately. Or, if you think you can do so safely and the individual is willing, take the person to the nearest hospital emergency room.

**Encourage the individual to safely store any possible means for suicide with someone they trust. Remove**

items such as knives, razors, firearms and medications.

- If the person takes a medication that could be used for overdose, develop a plan to have someone safeguard the medication and give it as prescribed.
- **If the person has a firearm, it may be unsafe for you to intervene directly.** If you are worried about your safety, call 911 or your local emergency number. You can always call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline to seek guidance at (800) 273-8255 (Press 1 if you are a Veteran, Service member or family member).

**C – Connect them to resources such as supportive friends and family, professionals or a crisis line.**

**Encourage the individual to *reach* out to their network of support – provide your help and support if they are unable to do this on their own.** This network may include mental health professionals, coworkers, neighbors, members of their community, friends, family and faith-based leaders. Connect the individual to others that may have been involved or assisted in the past.

**Call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255 (Press 1 if you are a Veteran, Service member or family member).** The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is a free resource that’s available to anyone. Alternately, text TALK to 741741 to text with a trained crisis counselor from the Crisis Text Line for free, 24/7.

### Remember

- When you are helping others, you also need to have support for yourself. Please take care of yourself. In order to provide the ongoing support that a loved one may need; you need to ensure you are getting support from others as well.
- Trained professionals can provide guidance, resources and assistance to you and/or the individual who may be in crisis.

**H – Help them make and maintain a plan to stay safe. Encourage them to share it with others.**

**Be part of the plan to provide a network of support and safety.** This may include working with mental health professionals that the individual currently sees – or those professionals who assess the individual during the crisis – to create a safety plan. This could also include engaging friends and family in conversations, offering support and assisting the individual to connect to the appropriate resources.

**Be direct and look for warning signs. Examples of warning signs and what you can do include:**

- Contact a mental health or healthcare professional – or 911 – immediately if the individual exhibits these signs:
  - Talking about wanting to die or to kill themselves
  - Extreme mood swings and remaining agitated and/or unable to calm themselves or sleep
  - Talking about feeling trapped or in unbearable emotional/mental pain
  - Exploring ways to kill themselves. For example, searching online for methods or buying a gun
  - Exhibiting extreme anger or rage. Being destructive, violent and/or reckless
  - Talking about seeking revenge
  - Talking about having no reason to live
  - Engaging in dangerous behavior
  - Expressing the world would be better off without them and/or giving their possessions away

- Offer support and help connect the individual to specific mental health resources (some of which can be found at REACH.gov) if the individual exhibits one or more of the following:
  - Increased use of alcohol or drugs
  - Referring to themselves as a burden to others
  - Seeming restless, having difficulty soothing themselves
  - Frequently tearful and/or sad
  - No appetite
  - Sleeping too little or too much
  - Withdrawing or isolating themselves
  - Failure to attend to basic personal hygiene
  - Unable to engage in typical activities or responsibilities – work, school or family obligations

*When we **REACH** to those in need we can provide help and offer support. We can connect them to resources that can keep them safe and help them heal. **#REACHnow***

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## Helpful responses when someone reaches out and is in emotional pain:

**Remain calm.** Don't panic. You are not alone. *Reach* out for help from professionals and other caring individuals while providing support. Your intervention may help the person see that other options are available and that hope is possible.

**Respond with compassion and respect.** Don't express shock or disappointment about how they feel and don't minimize statements that reflect the individual's wish to harm themselves or die. Respect the individual's feelings and emotional pain. Be supportive and express hope, as well as your belief that help is available. Express your willingness to be part of the network of support that the individual needs and deserves.

- **You can use phrases such as:**

- "I'm honored you are sharing this with me. I'm here to help."
- "I had no idea you were in such pain – I'm glad you told me."
- "I don't know that I have the right thing to say, but I want to help and I'm here to listen."
- "I care about you and I want you to be safe. Thank you for letting me help you."

**Be realistic with your promises.** Don't promise confidentiality. Be understanding, supportive and help connect the person at risk with the resources needed. The person may be uncomfortable telling you about their feelings and they may be conflicted about your intent to protect them from self-harm. Even if they don't agree, you may need to involve others to help them stay safe. Remember, the goal is to keep the individual safe – if you need assistance to do so, contact someone who can help.

- **If the individual asks that you do not tell anyone else, you can say:**

- "I care about you too much not to do everything I can to keep you safe."
- "Lots of people care about you and want you to stay safe. They want to help."
- "I hear that you don't want me to tell anyone, but I know that help is available. Let's call together."

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## When we REACH because we are hurting, we:

**R – Reach to a loved one or someone we trust. Don't be afraid to reach out – now.**

**Tell someone how you are really feeling.** Tell them if you are feeling hopeless or that you feel you have no reason to live. Don't try to minimize your pain. Tell them if you are considering harming yourself, if you are using drugs or alcohol, or if you feel isolated, anxious or angry.

**Remember, it's okay to not be okay. Tell someone. You are not alone.** Be as direct and honest as you can. You can use phrases such as:

- "I'm not okay. I'm thinking about harming myself."
- "I don't feel like I have any reason to live and I know I need help."
- "I'm worried about myself."
- "I'm concerned about myself."
- "I need to talk. I'm not doing very well. I know I need some help/support."

**E – Engage those we trust and discuss life changes and risk factors that are contributing to our pain.**

**Difficult or painful life events can leave us feeling helpless or hopeless.** But even the most difficult situations can be resolved and even the most painful feelings can pass. Sharing information with others about what we are facing can ease our burden and allow us to see solutions that we weren't able to find alone. We all need support. Sometimes we need more.

**We all have risk factors that can affect us – sometimes when we least expect it.** Understanding these factors – and sharing them with those who care about us – can help us develop effective coping strategies. It takes strength to allow others to see our vulnerabilities – but we all have them and sharing allows others to be there for us as we would be there for them.

**A – Attend to our safety and surroundings. Contact someone who can stay with us if we are worried about ourselves.**

**Tell a trusted friend or family member that you are concerned about yourself. Be as honest as you can – they will want to know that you are having a difficult time.**

**Ask for help to safely store any possible means for suicide.** Removing the means can help relieve pressure and help you focus on taking care of yourself. Ask for help removing items such as knives, razors, firearms, poisons and medications.

- If you take a medication that could be used for overdose, develop a plan to have someone safeguard the medication and give it as prescribed.
- If you have a firearm, it may be unsafe for you to keep the firearm in your possession for the time being. Ask someone you trust to store it for you or contact a Law Enforcement Agency to store it for you while you get the help you deserve.



**C – Connect** with family, friends or appropriate professionals. Contact a crisis line. Be as honest as we can so they can help.

**Reach out to your network of support.** This network may include family, friends, faith-based leaders, coworkers, members of your community and mental health professionals. Connect to others that may have assisted you in the past. Let people know you're not okay so that they can help. Members of your network can help navigate the resources available to you even if you feel exhausted, overwhelmed or hopeless. They can help take care of life chores or responsibilities while you focus on taking care of yourself.

**If you try to reach out and don't find someone available initially – keep trying! Don't give up.** Just because someone is busy doesn't mean they don't want to be there for you. Try to connect with others in your community you trust.

**If you aren't currently connected to one, contact a mental health professional who can provide guidance, resources and assistance.**

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**H – Help** others understand how they can help us stay safe. Share a safety plan if we have one.

Allow others to support you when you don't feel able to support yourself. If you have a safety plan that was helpful to you in the past, share it with your network.

If you don't have a safety plan, **call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255 (Press 1 if you are a Veteran, Service member or family member), contact a mental health professional or go to the nearest Emergency Room to develop one.**

Friends and family members want to help. Be clear with them and let them do what you might not be able to do for yourself right now. Someday, you may do the same for them.

*When we REACH because we are hurting, we allow those that care about us to provide help and support. When we REACH because we are hurting, we can connect to resources that keep us safe. #REACHnow*

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