

Finding support, viewing and sharing suicide or self-harm content online

The internet can be a place to find support around suicide or self-harm. But there are some risks involved. Use this guide to help you check how you're feeling and find ways of using the internet that keep you and others safer.

We want you to feel like you can ask anyone for support with what you see and do online. No one needs to feel ashamed of their internet use around this topic.



“ I treat the internet like a relative – sometimes it's just what I need and sometimes it's toxic. ”

Person with lived experience of internet use relating to suicide and self-harm.

How do I check if my internet use is helping me or not?

You could try...

...thinking about how it makes you feel.

Are you finding what you're doing comforting, or does it make you anxious or distressed? If you aren't sure, making a diary or notes about how you feel can help.

...thinking about what you're looking for online. Are you looking for shared experiences, or people who understand what you're going through? Are you looking for opportunities to support other people? Ask yourself if you're getting what you need from it.

...taking note of how your reactions to things online change. Seeing self-harm and suicide content regularly can start to change the way you think of them. If you see a lot of graphic images or descriptions, you can become more used to them. Some of what you see might make it feel like self-harm and

suicide are effective ways of dealing with difficult feelings. These changes can happen without you noticing. But stopping to check how you feel can help you realise how you're being affected.

...double checking that you can easily take a break. This could mean changing app or page, or moving away from the screen for an hour or two. It doesn't mean giving up your internet use. But if you find it hard to walk away when things get toxic or upsetting online, then you may want to create a plan to do things differently.

Using online tools to stay safer

Do you know the tools you can use to have more control of your online experience?

Here's a quick checklist of things you can do if something is upsetting you online. You can...

- make your account private
- unfollow or mute other accounts
- block a user from contacting you
- use keywords or #hashtags to hide certain content from your feeds
- find the community guidelines and decide if you agree with them
- report content or user behaviour that worries you

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Are you posting and sharing things about suicide or self-harm online? It's important for you to think about how it affects you and how it could affect other people.

It's helpful to...

...ask yourself why you're posting.

For example, you might want to raise awareness or you might be looking for support. If you know what you're aiming for, it can help you read what you've written and decide if it works.

...use a content warning. This helps people who want to avoid all mentions of a topic, even supportive or helpful ones. For example, you could write 'Content warning – this post discusses suicidal feelings.'

...think about the words you use.

Try to use phrases like 'ended their own life', rather than 'committed suicide', which can stigmatise suicide. Don't use language that suggests suicide is quick, painless, or a solution to a problem.

...share messages of hope and recovery.

Research shows that positive stories about overcoming a crisis can encourage other people to seek help.

...link to support services often. You could encourage people to reach out for help from one of the services below.

Try to avoid...

...sharing methods people can use for ending their own life, methods for self-harm or methods for hiding self-harm from other people. Research is starting to show that these things can lead to people copying what they see or read.

...sharing graphic descriptions or images of self-harm or suicide. Lots of people with similar experiences have told us that this can be very distressing.

...sharing things that use language that is unhelpful or insensitive, such as when an article makes suicide seem like the right choice. It can feel like you need to share problematic things to call out how bad they are – but try to resist.

Don't worry if you've shared things like this in the past. Think about whether they're still being viewed. If they are, you might consider whether you still want them on your feed, and delete or make them private.

Look after yourself

Practice being able to step away from upsetting or distressing content by changing to another app or going to make a drink. Spend time on the kinds of self-care that work best for you. Use the Samaritans App for ideas.

selfhelp.samaritans.org

Get support from other people

Health professionals, family and other people you can talk to might not understand the internet as well as you do. But talking to them about your internet use can still help. Samaritans have resources that you can share with them to help them have good conversations with you. samaritans.org/internet-safety-practitioners

Use safer support networks online

Many charities run online communities. Some people may find them safer places to share their experience and receive peer support.

- Side by Side (run by Mind)
- Mental Health Forum
- Togetherall
- Kooth (for 11–24 year olds)
- YoungMinds (for under 25s)
- The Mix (for under 25s)