

# Suicidal Ideation Response

Before asking, acknowledge the fear most people have:

"I want to ask about suicidal thoughts, because it is so common, especially when we are struggling (or have depression, etc). I want to share something first: I know it can be a scary topic, because sometimes people fear they will be 'locked up' if they share this. I want you to know it is very rare for someone to be hospitalized for this. It isn't just thoughts that would cause that, It would have to be a firm plan to suicide now or very soon. Even if you were feeling that, I wouldn't call in a crisis team or anything without telling you."



## 1. Ideation (If someone spontaneously shares ideation, go to step 2)

"Tell me about any thoughts you may have, in the past or now, wishing you were dead, or that you could go to sleep and not wake up... or about killing yourself?"

If they have thoughts currently:



**Reflect:**

"You sometimes do have thoughts of wanting to die..."

If yes, ask about:

If they have had thoughts in the past but not anymore ask about protective factors, strengths, etc:



**Reflect:**

"It sounds like it was a really hard time for you, last year... and that those thoughts haven't come back since then."

**OEQ:**

"I wonder what caused them to go away, and not come back..."

If they have not had any thoughts:



**Reflect:**

"You haven't had any thoughts like this..."

**Keeping the door open:**

"If you ever do have thoughts like this in the future, I hope you would feel comfortable sharing with me."

## 2. Ask About a Plan

"Sometimes when people have thoughts of wanting to die, they also have thoughts about how they would do it. Have you had thoughts about this?"

If yes,



**Reflect:**

"You've had thoughts about driving off a cliff near your house, or maybe taking an overdose of pills."

If no,



**Reflect:**

You haven't had those thoughts.

**And leave the door open:**

"I'm glad you haven't, and I want you to know if you do, in the future, I'd want you to feel you could share with me, as it would likely be a indication things were feeling much harder for you..."



THE  
LAY COUNSELOR  
ACADEMY

Then ask about:

### 3. Depth of Planning; Available Means

*"Tell me a bit more about your thoughts about these thoughts... are you having them now? How intense are they? How frequent? How much control do you have over them?"*

If yes,



**Ask:**

Do you have access to (the means)?

If yes, ask about:

If not too intense, frequent or current:

**OEO:**

Tell me about what how you handle them, when they come? **Follow Strengths.**

### 4. Active Suicidal Ideation with Specific Plan, Access to Means, and Intent

*"I know this is a tough subject, and I appreciate you trusting me to talk with about this. I have another questions: how intent are you, to carry out this plan soon?"*

If intent is high, or person is unsure they can control the intent, or has an imminent plan:



**Reflect:**

*"It sounds like you feel fairly certain you will do this, even though there is a small part of you that wants to stay alive."*

**Then, explain getting immediate help:**

*"I am going call the crisis team/my supervisor/the hospital, so we can keep you safe today. I will stay with you until we get to the next step of help, and share with you honestly everything I know that will happen. How do you feel about this?"*

If intent is low, follow strengths:



**Reflect:**

*"It sounds like there is a part of you that sometimes wants to die, and even thinks about ways to do it. And there is a big part of you that wants to stay on this planet. Tell me about that part of you..." (Go deep!)*

