

# Nurse suicide attempt survivors

## Easing back safely to the work environment

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**FREQUENTLY**, suicide ideation is a manifestation of mental illness, such as depression or anxiety disorder. However, even without a history or current diagnosis of mental illness, an individual can experience suicidal ideation with situational depression or stress related to life events. With appropriate intervention, any of these conditions are highly treatable. This means suicide can be prevented.

Many individuals survive a suicide attempt. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that one death by suicide occurs for every estimated 25 attempts. Most survivors do not die by suicide later. These statistics show that survivors can rebuild healthy, fulfilling lives.

**For survivors returning to work.** Your health and safety are the most important considerations. Create a comprehensive plan to follow when you feel unsafe. This plan will help you identify when you're in crisis, coping strategies, and whom to call. For more information, visit the Suicide Prevention Lifeline website ([suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://suicidepreventionlifeline.org)). Schedule and keep all healthcare appointments, including those for mental health, medication checks, therapy, treatment, and support groups. Adhere to your prescribed medication regimen. Before returning to work, think carefully about your responses to these questions:

- Are you ready to return? Consult with trusted support to assist in this critical decision.
- Are part-time hours or reduced shifts an option?
- Did your job play any part in the suicide attempt (impetus, stress, method)? How will you overcome these obstacles now?
- Do you want to return to your same position, or consider a change in venue, specialty, or even profession?

When you're back at work, ask for help when needed. Only share what you feel comfortable

with and only with those whom you trust.

**For coworkers.** When welcoming back a survivor, be encouraging. Avoid blaming statements such as, "Life couldn't have been that bad." Let your colleague know you're glad they're back and that you're available if they need help or want to talk. However, only offer what you can give without depleting your own reserves or being disingenuous.

**For nurse supervisors and employers.** Consult with human resources to ensure compliance with internal policies and procedures for the returning nurse. Encourage the nurse-survivor to come to you if they feel overwhelmed, stressed, or anxious while at work.

**Address all employees' mental health.** Promote your organization's mental health resources, which should include free and confidential mental health screenings. Nurses should be able to access these resources without fear of losing their job or license. A suicide attempt survivor returning to work is a reason to celebrate in a manner that honors the enormity of the impact felt by all concerned. This nurse is overcoming many obstacles and is ready to serve humankind. **AN**

*This article does not constitute legal or medical advice. For more information, visit the ANA Enterprise Nurse Suicide Prevention/Resilience website ([nursing-world.org/practice-policy/nurse-suicide-prevention](http://nursing-world.org/practice-policy/nurse-suicide-prevention)).*

If you have thoughts of suicide or self-harm, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1 800-273-TALK. If you believe someone is at imminent risk of harming themselves and is refusing help or you have reason to believe someone has harmed themselves, call 911.

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