

PATHWAYS VERMONT'S APPROACH TO SUICIDE

At Pathways Vermont, we see conversations about suicide as opportunities to build genuine connection. Instead of immediately shifting to risk assessment or intervention, we prioritize curiosity, validation, and compassion – recognizing that suicidal thoughts are a real and common part of the human experience.

The dominant approach to suicide often frames it as a crisis requiring urgent risk management. This can disrupt meaningful connection and, in some cases, cause more harm than good – leading to involuntary, forced treatment. Rather than focusing solely on preventing suicide at all costs, we choose to nurture relationships, believing that connection itself is a powerful force in helping individuals explore their experiences, find understanding, and create meaning in their lives.

Our Approach:

- Preserves dignity
- Prioritizes empathy and compassion
- Centers autonomy and mutuality in the relationship
- Promotes curiosity
- Reduces harm, stigma and shame

A Harm Reduction Approach to Suicide

Research shows that suicide prevention at all costs, which often involves coercion, force, and denial of rights and autonomy, actually increases the risk of death by suicide.

In a harm reduction approach, our goal is to foster and sustain connection – this CAN and DOES reduce the risk of suicide.

In this Approach, We Resist:

- Removal of rights
- Denial of autonomy and choice
- Assertion of power dynamics
- Judgment, dismissal, invalidation and moralization of someone's experience