

Understanding Suicide Pacts

What Is a Suicide Pact?

A suicide pact is when two (most common) or more people decide to end their lives by suicide together, often using the same method (most often overdose) and timing and for the same reason.

Key Facts

- Suicide pacts are rare, making up around only 1% of all suicides.
- Most involve two individuals, often with an extremely close emotional bond.
- Pacts can be formed in person or online.
- Some are mutually agreed upon; others involve coercion and unequal power.
- Pacts are usually well planned and tend not to be spontaneous or impulsive.
- The internet has increased the visibility and formation of such pacts, especially among vulnerable young people and isolated adults.
- Older married couples enter a suicide pact usually because one is suffering from a fatal or life altering condition, or financial or legal difficulties.
- Adolescent friends and romantic partners enter a suicide pact usually because of loneliness, disapproved relationships or parental problems.
- Overall, a significant driver of a suicide pact is the desire to avoid separation due to the threatening of a relationship between two particularly close individuals.

Warning Signs

- Talking about dying together or making shared plans to end life.
- Discovery of suicide-related online chats, searches, or forums.
- Expressing hopelessness, extreme dependence on one person and an inability to continue living without the other person.

How to Respond: Suicide pacts are preventable

Steps to take if you are made aware of an alleged pact:

1. Identify clearly all parties to the pact
2. Understand the plan: the proposed timing, location, and means to be used
3. Where the pact is being talked about; it may be more than one social media or chat forum
4. Identify who is best placed to screen and support each person allegedly involved in the pact

Each person involved in the pact will then need:

1. Screening to understand their current suicidal thoughts and plans
2. A safety plan that includes removal of access to means (particularly those identified for use in the pact), crisis and emergency numbers, support people
3. For young people, a connected adult preferably whānau, who can contribute to keeping them safe will need to be informed of the existence of the pact
4. Quality conversations about social media and online activity that encourages them to delete and/or report harmful conversations to the platform
5. Following the acute response, support those involved with problem solving and interventions to address the drivers to suicidal thinking disrupting the suicidal collaboration and rationale.