



A COMPASSIONATE FIRST STEPS TOOLKIT

When Life Feels Too Heavy

You do not have to solve everything today. This guide is here to help you find one safe, doable next step.

Start here: make the moment smaller

If your thoughts are racing, your body feels on edge, or you do not know what to do first, begin with the next ten minutes - not the whole future.

1 Check immediate safety

If you are in immediate danger, feel unable to keep yourself or someone else safe, or need urgent help, call local emergency services. In the U.S., call or text **988** for the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline.

2 Meet one basic need

Take a sip of water, eat something small, take medication only as prescribed, sit somewhere safer, or get a little fresh air if you can.

3 Let one person in

You can borrow this sentence: "I am having a hard time and I do not want to be alone with it. Can you stay with me for a few minutes?"

4 Choose one next action

Choose only one: rest, shower, step outside, send a message, write down a question, make an appointment, or ask for help finding support.

You are not failing because this is hard. Needing support is a human thing, not a weakness.



PART 2: STEADY THE MOMENT

A Two-Minute Grounding Reset

There is no “right” way to do this. Take what helps and leave what does not.

Try this gentle sequence

1 Look around

Name five things you can see. Let your eyes land on ordinary details: a color, a shape, a light, a familiar object.

2 Feel your support

Notice your feet on the floor, your back against a chair, or the weight of a blanket. Say quietly: “Right now, I am here.”

3 Slow the exhale

Try an easy inhale, then a slightly longer exhale. Do not force it. Repeat a few times if it feels okay.

4 Choose a comfort cue

Music, a warm drink, a familiar scent, a pet, a shower, or a quiet corner can signal care to your nervous system.

A small plan for the next hour

Write three answers somewhere you can see them:

One thing I need right now: _____

One person or place that could help: _____

One thing I can postpone until later: _____



PART 3: REACHING OUT

You Do Not Need Perfect Words

Asking for support can be simple, direct, and honest.

Scripts you can borrow

A When you need someone to listen

"I do not need you to fix this. I just need someone to listen for a few minutes."

B When you need practical help

"I am overwhelmed. Could you help me choose the next step or sit with me while I do it?"

C When you need professional support

"I have been having a hard time, and I would like help finding the right kind of support."

D When you are supporting someone else

"I am here with you. Would listening, practical help, or help finding support feel best right now?"

If someone cannot show up the way you hoped

That can hurt. It does not mean your need was too much or that you asked incorrectly. Try another trusted person, a community resource, or a qualified professional. Support often comes from more than one place.

Urgent support in the U.S.: call or text 988. You can also use the 988 Lifeline chat at 988lifeline.org.



PART 4: NEXT STEPS

Build Support One Small Piece at a Time

You are allowed to move slowly. A plan only needs to be useful for today.

Your next-day check-in

- 1 What feels most urgent?**
Name the one concern that needs attention first.
- 2 What support would help?**
Listening, an appointment, transportation, food, rest, advocacy, or help finding information are all valid needs.
- 3 Who can help?**
Write down one person, service, or organization you can contact.
- 4 What is one kind thing I can do for myself?**
Keep it small and realistic. A next step is still progress.

Trusted starting points

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline: call or text 988; chat at 988lifeline.org. Free, confidential U.S. crisis support.

SAMHSA FindTreatment.gov: treatment locator for mental health and substance-use services in the U.S.

Review date: August 2026. Resources and availability can change; verify local options directly.

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