



## Thoughts on Suicide Prevention from a Counsellors Perspective.

Suicidal thoughts are more common than we like to think and there are many reasons for a person to consider ending their life. It might be a combination of negative emotions, physical and/or emotional pain leading one to feel overwhelmed and distressed and unable to function normally. In this state of mind, it can be difficult to sleep, to enjoy food or to relate to family members or friends.

It is thought that people who consider suicide don't necessarily want to die, they simply don't know how to cope with, or how to eliminate the pain they are experiencing.

Statistics show that suicide remains the leading cause of death for Australians aged between 15 and 44 and that the rate amongst males is three times greater than that for females.

Suicide prevention starts with recognising your warning signs, the changes that let you know that you are heading into a crisis. Knowing your warning signs can help you take preventative action.

Some warning signs may be wishing that you were no longer here, planning a way to end your life, thinking that your family and friends would be better off without you, feeling that you don't belong, or, you may be feeling overwhelmed by situations in your life leading to feelings of helplessness and hopelessness.

It is important to make your space as safe as you can, to get rid of anything that could be used to end your life.

Although there are times when you feel painfully alone it is important for you to know there are always people who care for you. It can be helpful to note the names and phone numbers of two or three people you can call upon when feeling low; friends you can trust to help you stay safe and feel better. People you can talk to when you are feeling suicidal.

These feelings are brought about by a perceived

inability to cope with the current circumstances of life and a feeling of it being too hard to move forward, a feeling that there is no escape and an inability to see any alternative to your current position. When you feel this way, it is helpful to think about all the good things in life, thinking this way can help you to manage until the feelings pass. It can help to write down the things that make you want to live; your children, your friends, your dog, your bucket list!

Doing things to distract yourself from suicidal thoughts can help keep you safe. Walking on the beach or in the bush, listening to music, breathing, practising meditation, exercising, whatever you find works for you.

A lack of self-esteem and a feeling of worthlessness under the current situation is generally a prevalent emotion.

In order to prevent this style of thinking, education is needed from early childhood onwards.

Children must be shown that their best is good enough and that they are not required to be competitive in a manner than that could lead to a feeling of failure and thereby a negative sense of self.

An ability to see the bright side of life even when things are tough is an attitude that can be modelled and encouraged and an ability to have compassion for self and others is also something that can be modelled and re-enforced from early childhood on.

We all, at any age, need to identify and live by our values. In doing so we can play by our strengths and do things that add meaning to our lives.

Counsellors generally ask their clients to think about their values and to formulate a list of the things they hold most dear in their lives as whilst these should be fundamental, many of us have never given them a thought!

Even within a strong family network where feelings and emotions are freely discussed in a non-judgemental manner, deaths by suicide occur.

From a counselling perspective, it is important to understand what has happened to cause the client's suicidal ideation – not what is WRONG with the client.

A good counsellor will look at the bigger picture and enquire about the client's physical health, ask when they last had a medical check-up and discuss their diet and exercise regime.

The issue that has brought the client to seek help is then discussed. Evidence shows us that counselling can help you to cope better with every-day life by assisting you to develop strategies to deal with the depression and anxiety that can lead to suicidal thoughts. Counselling for those suffering post-traumatic stress or other forms of trauma, have also been found to greatly assist in overcoming suicidal ideation.

It has been found that people who have a Lived Experience, which is defined as having experienced suicidal thoughts, survived a suicide attempt, cared for someone through a suicidal crisis, or been bereaved by suicide, can greatly assist in suicide prevention by benefit of their experience. This is because of the critical role of the 'voice' of those who have been impacted by suicide loss or suicidality, for informing and better understanding suicide and its prevention.

Some ways we know that can assist us to deal with a friend, relative or client are to connect with them, engage in conversation, to show an active interest in

their thoughts, feelings and ideas. Just being around other people can make you feel better.

In the case of family or friends, if you suspect that there is something negative happening in their lives, show warmth and loving affection and ask the questions, offer assistance, be fully there for them! Even if you are rebuffed, it is necessary to gently persist.

We need to create a mutual support system. To identify those within our family and friendship groups in whom we can confide if we are feeling troubled or depressed and to in turn be available for them should they appear to be experiencing difficulties.

The RUOK campaign allowed people to feel cared about, to be wanted and loved and that is something we all need every day! So don't be afraid to ask your family, members, friends, workmates the question! RUOK? Or simply "How are you going?"

Daily activity has been proven to be extremely beneficial. Whatever it is that you enjoy doing; walking, running, swimming, gardening, working out. Regular exercise will lift your mood by releasing endorphins (our happy hormones) and thereby counter depression and anxiety.

When we contribute or participate socially we feel included and valued. Our brains are wired to experience pleasure when we do something to help another! So the message is to be kind! Volunteer! Smile often and feel grateful! Try to extend a gesture of kindness to someone each day.

Gratitude is something counsellors often speak to clients about. It is hard to feel really down if you are looking to find things to be grateful for across all aspects of your day.

We can be grateful for every aspect of our day, no matter how insignificant and if anything in your life is jarring and causing you unhappiness then, reflect on it and do something about changing whatever it is that you are finding upsetting.

This is your one precious life so it makes sense to make it the most fulfilling that it can be.

An active, enquiring mind is also an antidote to self-pitying thoughts.

Learning new skills, taking on new responsibilities, playing a musical instrument, reading, all contribute to positive feelings of self-worth!

We need to continually examine our attitudes and our responses to adversity so that we can develop strategies to become more resilient to the challenges of life.

Counsellors often ask their clients to set goals for themselves. Short term goals from one to four weeks and then, four to eight weeks and then looking further ahead, six months to one year and to include every aspect of their lives; dining out, weekend jaunts, planning for holidays.

Goals could also look at household projects and could thus alleviate some of the frustrations incurred when expectations are unrealistic.

Setting goals allows one to think ahead in a realistic and happy manner and can assist in gaining a more positive outlook generally.

We all need something to look forward to!

Disclaimer: This article was written and provided by Patricia Reilly (Masters - Family Counselling; Lived Experience Member of Roses in the Ocean Suicide Prevention Group and Suicide Prevention Australia; Experienced Loss and Grief Counsellor.)



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Patricia Reilly – A Lived Experience member of the Roses in the Ocean Suicide Prevention Group and Suicide Prevention Australia, and an experienced Loss and Grief Counsellor.

Patricia is the counsellor with an unconventional approach to healing individuals, couples and families.

Patricia has been in practice for over a decade combining her professional knowledge, life experience and passion for helping people in order to provide the best counselling service possible.

In doing so, she has assisted children and families to develop various coping strategies to assist in navigating today's turbulent world. Her approach is empathetic, practical and insightful.

A focus of her work is the development of emotional intelligence, emotional resilience, emotional regulation and positive self-esteem.

The importance of learning to live life in the moment whilst taking the lessons of the past into account and looking forward to the future is also a recurrent theme of Patricia's approach with her clients.

Patricia provides her clients with a combination of personal growth, counselling, and psychotherapeutic methods including her unique use of Sand therapy, to facilitate emotional healing. She strongly believes that a happy and healthy mind/body connect is essential for life skills.

Patricia is deeply committed to helping each individual, whether child or adult achieve the very best version of themselves possible!

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