

The Suicidal Mind

Why do you want to say goodbye
now?



Sri Lanka Sumithrayo

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Dedication



Rev. Dr. Chad Varah

Founder of the Samaritans Movement

“Volunteering can change someone’s life – yours.”

Without you – There’s no us!



Joan de Mel

Our Founder

We are eternally grateful for
50 years of befriending

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

The primary objective of Sri Lanka Sumithrayo is to prevent suicides. We also provide support to anyone who has feelings of depression, facing the stresses in life and needs someone to listen and to unburden themselves. We are a government approved charity founded in 1974 and was incorporated by an Act of Parliament No.10 of 1986. Sri Lanka Sumithrayo functions as a non-political, non-religious organisation focused on providing emotional support to help those at risk of suicide. We have 12 centres spread across Sri Lanka. It is a volunteer run organization using "Listening and Befriending" as a method to help anyone in need.

Anyone can talk to us about their distressed feelings face-to-face, on the phone, or through email and on WhatsApp. Our services are free of charge. If you are unhappy and in pain, talk to us. We will listen to you with love, care and empathy. Complete confidentiality and anonymity are maintained in every conversation.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Apart from befriending, on request, we provide awareness programs on suicide prevention and mental wellbeing to schools, universities, public and private organizations.

We hope to draw your kind attention to the prevention of suicide based on the experience gained from our continuous engagement in this field of service for half a century.

This little book has been prepared because we believe suicide prevention is a responsibility and a duty of us all.

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CHAPTER 1

Daughter - A Narrative

Looking pale and smiling weakly, she nervously looked at me. I smiled and guided her to sit in the chair by the window. I sat opposite her. She kept looking down, her shoulders hunched. She seemed distraught and uncertain of what to do next.

I leaned forward and said softly, "Take your time, I am in no hurry at all". She nodded, the tears rolling down her face, her sobs growing louder. I reached for the box of tissues and handed her a few, "I don't know where to start" she whispered. Then she put her hand inside the pocket of her faded jeans and took out a photograph of a man.

"My father" she said and began to sob uncontrollably. "After my father left me, I couldn't concentrate on my studies. I couldn't eat or sleep. I just lay on my bed and cried. I miss my father terribly. Why didn't he take me with him? Where is he? Why has he abandoned me?"

I reached out and took the photograph she gave me. It was worn and crumpled at the corners, "I sleep with it under my pillow, I love my father, no one else. My mother made him leave home. She hates my father. She hates me too."



Through her tears she related the devastation she felt the day her father left home, carrying a suitcase and an umbrella. Dinusha's mother favored her older sister. She had no kind words for her younger daughter. She compared her older sister to her, taunting her that her sister was a graduate and has a brilliant future. "My mother calls me a loser because I gave up my university studies in my second year."

She cried, fresh tears streaming down her face. "I feel so alone. Unwanted and so lonely like a piece of wood no one wanted." I touched her shoulder gently and asked her if she had anyone else in her family who perhaps cared for her.

“Yes, my uncle and aunt. My father’s brother”, she explained. “They care for me, they love me, I know. They have asked me to come and live with them.” “Dinusha, would you like to live with them in their home?”, I asked. “My mother won’t hear of it.” she said, her head bowed.

“Did your mother know you were going out today?” I asked. “No, I left home as soon as I heard her close the gate. My uncle had given me some money so I was able to come here. I saw the name of your organisation, Sri Lanka Sumithrayo in the newspaper. The slogan said, ‘Talking Helps’. I have no one to talk with so I came here.” She smiled for the first time, I smiled and leaned forward and told her she is safe here, everything we spoke about is confidential and that we are a suicide prevention organisation, I explained.

There was a flicker of fear in her eyes. “Dinusha”, I asked softly, “do you feel like life is not worth living?” She nodded, looking down, clenching her fists.

“Dinusha, you don’t have to be afraid. I am here with you. I will stay with you until we sort things out. Tell me, have you thought of how you might want to do it?” There was no answer, only her tears streaming down her face again.

“I have something” she whispered, “It’s in my pocket”. Saying that she took it out from her back pocket.. Then with a burst of energy she said, “I don’t ever want to go home again. It’s better to die”. “Dinusha, there is an option we can discuss”. I said. “What option?”she asked.

“Would you like me to ask your uncle to come to meet us now?” “Yes.” She said softly, nodding her head. “Dinusha, is it ok if I tell your uncle everything you told me and that you felt so alone you had even thought of ending your life”. “Yes, he will understand.” she said.

I picked up the telephone and dialed the number. Dinusha’s uncle picked up the phone almost immediately.

He listened to me without making any interruptions and came to the centre in no time.

“Dinusha, I would be pleased if you can leave those with me”, I said, pointing to what she took out from her pocket. She waited a few minutes as if she was unable to take a decision and then handed them to me. She left her phone number so that I could follow up and I asked her to come back again soon. I informed the uncle not to leave her alone. Suicidal thoughts can be very strong within 24–48 hours.

Two days later she turned up with her uncle and also the mother. She too was shocked that Dinusha had contemplated suicide and promised to make positive changes.

Dinusha decided to live with her uncle and aunt. Now, her mother and sister drop in to see her frequently.

Names and details of this narrative has been changed to maintain confidentiality

CHAPTER 2

The Human Mind

There is a limit to what the human mind can bear. When under severe emotional stress, one may be driven to veer towards ending it all unless there is proper support available.

If a human beings' natural instinct is to live, why destroy one's precious life? This is a question to ponder in these times of increasing despair and suicides. We believe that all of us have to take a closer look at the suicidal behaviours among people around us and be socially conscious on how to prevent such tragic deaths.

Is it the loneliness and isolation with no one to care for that drive people to this end? Are they so helplessly anguished with their inability to cope with their wrapped-up emotions unseen and unheard by anyone else?

Can we truthfully say we have not had moments of anguish ourselves when confronted with impossible life situations?

Within our own family, our friends, colleagues, neighbours and even fellow bus and train travellers. Most likely they have their own grief stories and not having anyone to unburden themselves, some of them may even be contemplating suicide.

There also might be individuals who appear to be normal with their behaviour and with well-balanced lives who do not wish to share their stressful feelings with anyone else. Though fear, embarrassment, or shame of being judged they remain silent but may end up in suicide with no apparent reason known.

According to studies, it's not easy to give one definite cause for suicide as it is a complex combination of factors that lead to ending ones life.

Do we at least for a moment open our eyes to what such people are going through? What do such people need? They need someone to talk to, someone to listen to and be concerned about their distresses.

Relationships

Life is a network of interpersonal relationships. Healthy relationships give us a positive outlook about life but when disruptions happen, it can cause a lot of stress and tension in one's life. In such a situation, one can feel like being at the end of the world. Such negative feelings can even make a person miserable, lonely, isolated and may even be suicidal.



Myths and Misconceptions about Suicide

Myth: If a person attempts suicide and fails, he/she will never make another attempt.

Fact: A suicide attempt is an indicator of further attempts. The person may try again and again if no support is available and may succeed in the end.

Myth: All who kill themselves are mentally ill.

Fact: If a person is having prolonged serious depression or having a psychotic illness, he/she is more prone to dying by suicide. History of suicide in the family also may contribute to such incidents but all those who die by suicide are not mentally ill.

Myth: A person who die by suicide does so with the sole intention of dying.

Fact: Majority of the people who feel suicidal do not actually want to die. They just want a way out of the miserable situation they are in, which is why talking about it with a trusted person is so important. Emotional support and empathy are vital at this moment.

Myth: Talking about suicide or asking someone if they feel suicidal will encourage suicide attempts.

Fact: Talking about suicide provides them the opportunity for communication. It provides them with an opening to talk about their feelings.

Myth: Suicide attempts or deaths happen without warning.

Fact: There are always warning signs that were not recognized.

Myth: Only the poor and uneducated die by suicide

Fact: Suicide has no respect for social standings or educational levels.

We need to have awareness and knowledge about suicide and the suicidal mind and behaviour.



CHAPTER 3

Warning Signs

It's 3 AM. I'm still awake, I can't sleep. Half an hour to me is as lengthy as 3 hours. I keep thinking endlessly about so many things. My mistakes, my failures, my losses. I fear for what would happen to me in the future. It's so hard to bear all this alone by myself. My wife is fast asleep in the next room. If I don't talk to someone, I'll go insane.



Shock and disbelief are two emotions that can alter a person's life within seconds. The sudden death of a loved one. A medical report that confirms a terminal illness. The loss of a limb after an accident. Why me? It's a question asked time and time again.

We may have often heard some people say that they are fed up with life, that nobody cares whether they live or die. Some may say they are at the end of their tether and it would be better to go away. How each one would face such situations needs to be looked at closely.

These are the signs of suicidal ideation. We need to have the ability to be concerned about such people and their behaviours.



Reasons for Suicide

Suicide according to studies is a complex mix of psychological, biological, environmental and social factors. The apparent reasons may be one or more of the incidents that may have triggered actions such as:

- A breakdown of a relationship – death, divorce, separation, migration of family.
- A significant loss in life – a loved one, limb, position, employment etc.
- An incurable illness.
- Loss of face.
- Failure, isolation and rejection.
- Loneliness – especially among the elderly.
- Addiction to modern technological gadgets – especially by children & youth.
- Use of drugs and alcohol.
- Cyber bullying – especially among youth.

How to Identify a Suicidal Person

- Sad and depressed
- Sleep disturbed
- Physically weak and worn out
- Loss of appetite or excessive eating
- Complains of body aches and pains
- Aimlessly wondering about
- Talking about death constantly
- Expresses feelings of hopelessness
- Violent or impulsive behaviour
- Withdrawn from family, friends and associates
- Loss of sexual interest
- Loss of interest in daily work routine
- Having a mental illness
- Having a disabling or terminal illness
- has attempted suicide in the past
- Having a family history of death by suicide

To the Person Contemplating Suicide

If you are worried and unhappy:

- Do not make hasty decisions.
- Do not cause harm to yourself or others.
- Do not battle alone with your stressful feelings.

Seek help immediately:

- From a trusted family member.
- From a trustworthy friend or acquaintance.
- From a teacher or member of the clergy.
- From a medical professional
- From Sri Lanka Sumithrayo

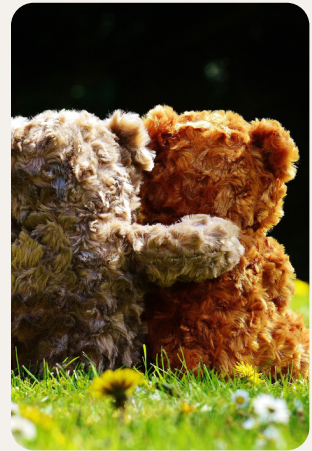


CHAPTER 4

How to Prevent Suicides

Following measures may be helpful to a suffering person to feel empowered, to feel calm, to relax and be rational enough to sort out options and face another day.

- Be a close friend.
- Never leave the person alone.
- Encourage the person to talk about one's troubled feelings.
- Do not criticize, blame or be judgmental.
- Do not reject or neglect.
- Ask if the person has suicidal feelings; if yes find out details such as **Time, Place, Means**
- Remove objects that can be used.
- Seek help from professionals.



What Can We Do ?

- Recognise the warning signs.
- Identify persons with suicidal risk.
- Be concerned.
- Get involved.
- Show care and empathy.
- Provide awareness about suicide prevention services.
- Provide emotional support and guidance.
- Help the person to feel that he/she is not alone and that help is at hand.
- Listen, Listen, Listen with care, respect, acceptance and warmth.
- Follow-up



Listening is Healing, a Miraculous Healing

As an organisation where the primary objective of our service is the prevention of Suicide, “The incredible power of listening” is the foremost skill that our volunteers offer to anyone who visits us face to face or on the telephone. We impart the same care by ‘listening’ to the negative emotions expressed on email and other digital messages sent to us by people having no one to talk with and who feel very much alone, unloved or uncared for.

Feeling ashamed or guilty can be a heavy burden to carry if there is no one to share it with. This can lead to feelings of eg: isolation from loved ones, loneliness and despair. “would she/he ask for a divorce? What will my little son do when I don’t come home?”

Sleep becomes illusive and night time can make dark thoughts even darker, to ink black. Thoughts of ending one’s life becomes the only way out.

Characteristics of a Good Listener

- One who makes the time and has patience.
- Kind, caring and empathic.
- Accepting and non-judgmental.
- Able to use soft and gentle tone of voice.
- Does not feel shocked and disturbed by what the other person reveals.
- Able to keep a confidence.
- Expecting nothing in return.
- Having a personality with a warm-hearted approach.



Listening & Befriending @ Sri Lanka Sumithrayo

When a person who is in need walks into one of our centres, it could very well be that the person has no one to turn to. Might have come as the last resort. How we speak to them, our body language, our tone of voice helps in making the person feel comfortable and a little less stressed. Assured of confidentiality, anonymity and being accepted makes it easier to unburden.

The caller is given undivided attention, every word, every little gesture the person makes is observed and the depth of the anxiety is felt by the volunteer. Being non-judgmental is one of the most reassuring attitudes that can make the person feel accepted and cared for.

This will make both the caller and the befriender feel comfortable with each other and create a trusting bond.

CONCLUSION

The encouraging and helpful fact about suicide is that, it is preventable. It needs an individual and a collective will and effort and a genuine commitment.

Be a friend and remain with the person, never leaving the person alone. They need our empathy, our human warmth and care. They need to be encouraged to talk with someone who is willing to listen with undivided benevolent attention. They need to feel that they are not alone and isolated and that there is someone out there to listen with care and befriend until one is able to think rationally. Such acceptance and reassurance can be both healing and a blessing to the speaker and the listener.

Thank you for reading. You can share this book with someone else to spread the message



Call:

0707 308 308 Sri Lanka Sumithrayo Hotline
1926 National Mental Health Helpline
1333 CCC Crisis support Helpline

Volunteer:

<https://srilankasumithrayo.lk/>

Fill out an application

Donate:

Call: +94 11 2 682535

Email: slssumithrayo@gmail.com

& get the bank details