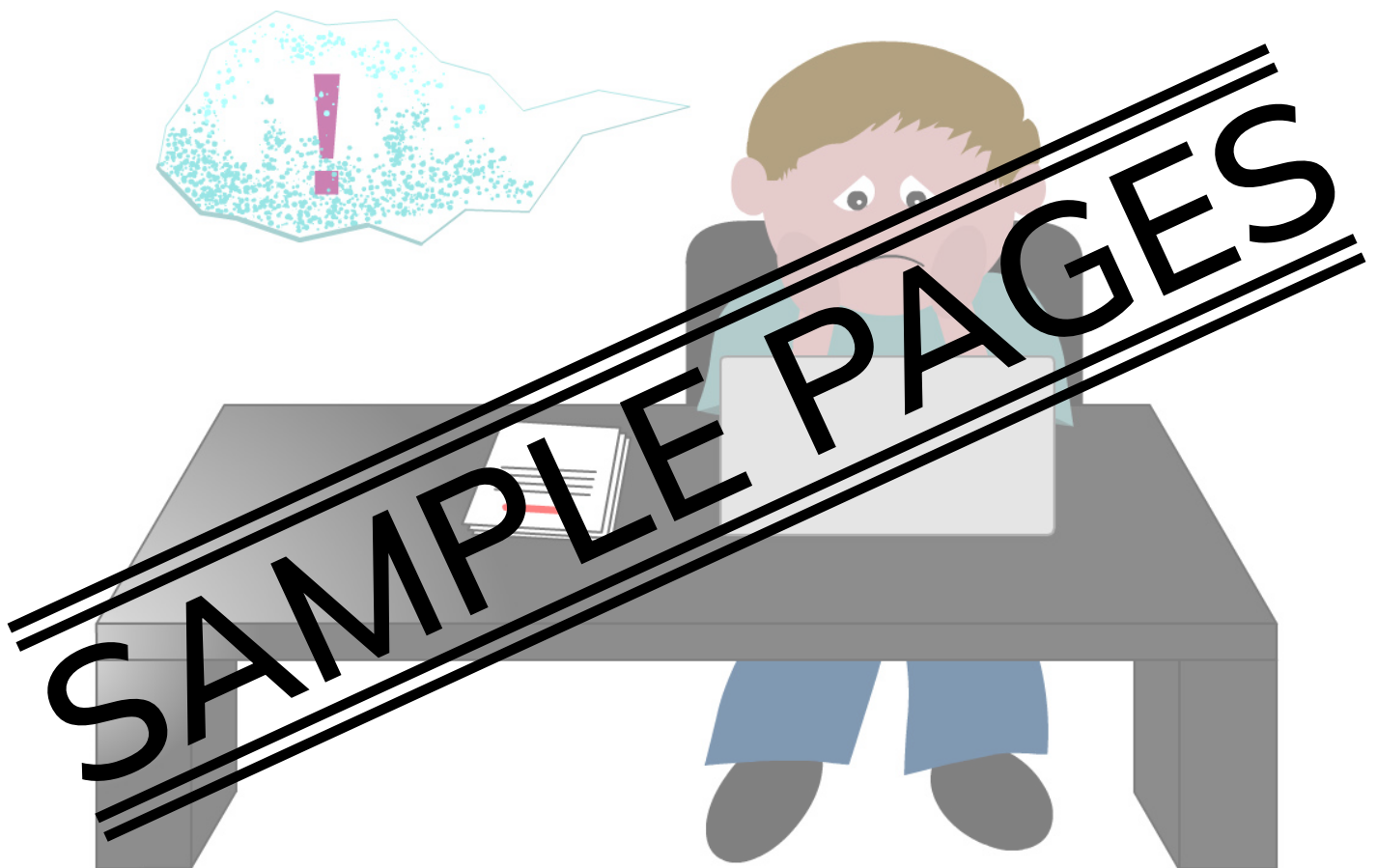


SUICIDE AWARENESS AND PREVENTION



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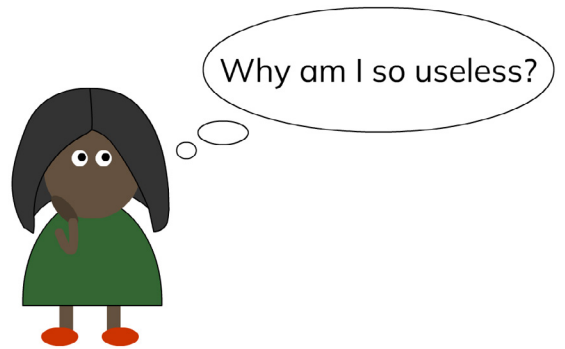
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What is Suicide?

Suicide is, to most people, a taboo subject. Nobody likes to talk about it. Yet many people either know of someone who has died by suicide or who has considered taking their own life, or perhaps they have even considered suicide themselves. When we consider the basic survival instincts of most humans, it is hard to imagine what could drive a person to want to end their own life. How does someone reach the stage where living is no longer an option? What happened to them to make them feel this way?

Suicide is a devastating public health issue. It wreaks despair and helplessness on families and communities and is one of the most difficult events to deal with. Historically, it has been a difficult matter to discuss because of the sensitive nature of the subject. However, it must be discussed. Suicide isn't "someone else's problem", it's "everyone's problem", we are all involved and affected by suicide.



For many of us, life can be a constant struggle. However, we all manage to cope with the day to day problems that are common to us all. However, when someone is feeling suicidal, the trials of life can overwhelm them, making them feel defeated, crushed and disappointed. Even trivial things can cause anguish and worry to certain individuals—and it can be difficult for some people to understand this. Things can deteriorate to such an extent that they may start to think of their options—and death may be one of them. The trouble with thinking about suicide even once is that, once the idea settles in the mind, the thought can come back again. For someone who has considered suicide in the past, whenever things spiral out of control, their mind can easily flip into "ending it all" mode because they are faced with serious problems again. They become convinced that the world would be better off without them and they may start to plot ways of carrying out their plan.

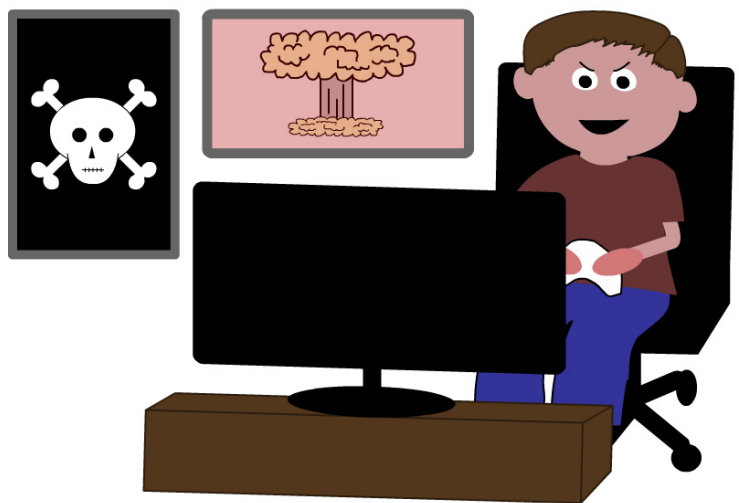
obviously very unhappy with their current situation and are looking for a way out of it or are trying to find ways to end their feelings of negativity.

Remember—people who talk about suicide often go on to carry out a suicide attempt. It is easy to spot direct threats, but not as easy to recognise indirect threats. So while it is vital to be aware of the various threats a depressed person may make, it is also important to look out for some of the other warning signs.

One very important point—if you are worried or concerned about someone and suspect something is wrong, do not be afraid to ask them directly if they have been thinking about suicide. This may be difficult to do, but it may save their life. Research has shown that asking about suicide will not put the idea into their heads or make them take action. Actually, if they are seriously considering suicide, your direct questions will help them feel that someone understands and cares about them. Talk to them privately, stay calm and listen without judging them.

Preoccupation with Death and Dying

One indicator that someone is feeling suicidal is an unhealthy preoccupation with death, dying, funerals and funeral arrangements, and a morbid curiosity regarding what happens when people die. They may even start to imagine what will happen at their own funeral and might start to write out a will. This obsession with death can sometimes be expressed through poetry or stories or some other form of writing or artwork. Sometimes, a suicidal person will start to draw horrific pictures depicting death or violent scenes. Their pessimistic outlook may even affect the way they dress, and they might start to avoid bright clothing, opting for dark colours or dressing all in black, which may be out of character. Even their doodles can seem death-oriented, morbid and overly melancholic and this is often inconsistent with their usual behaviour. Another sign, particularly among young people, is a fixation on graphic violence in films or TV shows as well as violent video games and music with overtly morbid or violent lyrics. You may notice a newfound interest



Putting Affairs in Order

As well as giving away possessions, a person considering suicide may start to put their affairs in order and tie up loose ends. For example they may tidy their room, return borrowed items, or visit family members or friends they haven't seen for some time. They might examine their finances and you may discover they have written a will which specifies what should happen to their possessions after they die. They may even have specified what songs are to be sung at their funeral and start to enquire about funeral costs and flowers. Clearly this is not normal behaviour and these are all clear signs that they are considering something drastic.

Use of Alcohol and Drugs

When someone is suicidal, they may use alcohol or drugs for the first time, or overindulge in them far more than usual. Many teenagers experiment with alcohol and drugs, and sadly the UK and Ireland still rank highly among the worst offenders in Europe for underage drinking. Adults may use their drug of choice to excess, and often they will say they are trying to blot out their problems. Unfortunately, their problems are still there when they sober up, and so they drink some more, and the vicious cycle goes on.

We know that alcohol is a depressant, and alcohol will therefore make a depressed person feel even more depressed. Excessive drinking may not be the direct cause of suicidal thoughts, but it can certainly contribute to depression. A suicidal person who is under the influence of drink or drugs will do things they would never do when sober. Alcohol is a factor in many suicides and it is apparent that a person who is contemplating suicide will be more likely to carry out their plan if their judgement is clouded by alcohol or drugs. If they can abstain from drink or drugs for long enough for their mind to clear, they will be able to think more rationally and you may be able to talk to them in a calmer atmosphere.

If you notice that someone you know is either starting to drink or take drugs, or they are drinking more heavily than usual, this may be a sign that they are severely depressed and they need help. It is important to tackle this issue head on—be blunt and ask direct questions. Indulging in alcohol or drugs is never a good thing, no matter what the age or circumstances.

Suicide Prevention Programmes on Our Railways

Current Situation

When someone dies by suicide on the railways, it takes a terrible toll on all involved. There are dreadful consequences for families and railway staff including train drivers and emergency staff who deal with the aftermath of such a tragedy.

It is difficult to prevent someone who is determined to end their life on the railways. There is ongoing research which seeks to throw light on the behaviours that may precede a suicide attempt, but further research is needed to understand the mindset of such an action.

What is Being Done?

Transport and railway organisations are currently training staff to intervene in suicide attempts. Partnerships are also being set up with mental health charities to remove the stigma attached to mental health issues including suicide.

There are currently a number of training programmes for railway staff to teach them how to reach out to a person in crisis who is exhibiting suicidal behaviour. Staff have intervened in many potential suicides and lives have been saved.

What is Required?

Again, as with the waterways, we are all responsible and can play our part in relation to suicide prevention. One prevention idea is to have barriers on all stations that prevent jumping, but this is not possible in many railways stations due to the layout. The most effective method is to educate people on how to prevent a suicide.

As part of our own personal education, we can keep an eye out for any available suicide prevention courses and public awareness campaigns. Many courses are free of charge. There are also resources available online which teach how to approach and manage a suicidal person on the platform, thereby saving a life.

