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Suicide and Depression

Why is it important to spread suicide awareness?

Awareness is vital as Suicide is a preventable Tragedy. It is important to understand that suicide is not chosen; it happens when pain experienced exceeds their ability to cope with the pain. You are not a bad person, or crazy, or weak, or flawed, because you feel suicidal. It doesn't even mean that you really want to die - it only means that you have more pain than you can cope with at the time.

Through awareness we need to convey very strongly that the act of showing care and concern to someone who may be vulnerable to suicide can be a game-changer. Asking them whether they are OK, listening to what they have to say in a non-judgmental way, and letting them know you care, can all have a significant impact. These are some of the important messaging during awareness.

What are the rates since the start of Covid-19?

We received between 6-8 counselling calls per day mainly due to depression and feelings of loneliness. There was a definite increase during the lockdown.

What influences suicide especially amongst youth?

There are various influences namely mental illness, traumatic stress, drug and alcohol abuse, fear of loss or failure, bullying especially amongst the teenagers, hopelessness, also if a person has chronic pain or a terminal illness, some feel that their life is a burden to others and another influencing factor is that of social isolation.

What services does Lifeline Durban offer for people you may be suicidal?

- We have a 24/7 Crisis Line
- We provide face to face counselling, couple counselling and family group counselling.
- We provide support groups
- Personal growth courses
- One can reach out to a Lifeline Durban counsellor on 031 312 2323 (24/7 crisis line) or WhatsApp call on 083 639 2323.
- Alternatively you can call our offices for booking a face to face session on 031 303 1344.

What can family members look out for to know that a person is suicidal?

You can't see what a person is feeling on the inside, so it isn't always easy to identify when someone is having suicidal thoughts. However, some outward warning signs that a person may be contemplating suicide include:

- talking about feeling hopeless, trapped, or alone
- saying they have no reason to go on living
- making a will or giving away personal possessions
- searching for a means of doing personal harm, such as buying a gun
- sleeping too much or too little
- eating too little or eating too much, resulting in significant weight gain or loss
- engaging in reckless behaviours, including excessive alcohol or drug consumption

- avoiding social interactions with others
- expressing rage or intentions to seek revenge
- showing signs of extreme anxiousness or agitation
- having dramatic mood swings
- talking about suicide as a way out

What steps can one take to prevent being suicidal?

You can survive suicidal feelings if you do either of two things: (1) find a way to reduce your pain, or (2) find a way to increase your coping resources. Both are possible.

The following is what we often discuss in our counselling sessions:

- You need to hear that people do get through this -- even people who feel as badly as you are feeling now.
- Give yourself some distance. Say to yourself, "I will wait 24 hours before I do anything." Or a week.
- People often turn to suicide because they are seeking relief from pain. Remember that relief is a feeling.
- Some people will react badly to your suicidal feelings, either because they are frightened, or angry; they may actually increase your pain instead of helping you.
- Don't give yourself the additional burden of trying to deal with this alone. Just talking about how you got to where you are, releases an awful lot of the pressure, and it might be just the additional coping resource you need to regain your balance.
- Suicidal feelings are, traumatic. After they subside, you need to continue caring for yourself. Therapy is a really good idea.

- Pravisha Dhanapalan, Director of Lifeline Durban
For an interview with Tabloid Newspapers.