

Thinking About Your Personal Readiness To Share Your Story

So you want to share your story or get involved in suicide prevention activities but not quite sure if you are ready?

Talking about suicide, sharing your story and experiences, learning about research, policy and programs, and so on, can be an incredibly rewarding, healing and a hopeful experience but it can also be emotionally and mentally draining and can have an impacts on your physical and emotional wellbeing. It is important to recognize and self reflect on where you are at in your own journey.

For those who are already involved in suicide prevention activities, it is worth pausing to reflect on a regular basis on how your involvement is affecting your mental and physical health.

Integrating your experience with suicide into your world view and sense of self

Every person has their own unique response to suicide and there are no right or wrong responses. Words that are often used to describe an experience with suicide include catastrophic, numbing, devastating, overwhelming, exhausting, confusing, triggering, and so on. These are highly emotionally charged words.

Some people report achieving significant insights about their sense of self and connection to life while others find their world view shattered and confusing.

It can be difficult to find a new balance where you are able to think constructively about your experience and not become overwhelmed with emotions or left feeling vulnerable. Most people find they need time to reflect on their experience before getting involved in suicide prevention activities.

Reflection Points;

- What words do you use to describe your experience with suicide? Have these changed over time? Do they still carry the same charge of emotion now compared to in the immediate weeks or months after the crisis?
- What are your energy levels like after thinking or talking about your experience with suicide? If you experience a drop in energy, how long does it take you to regain your energy? Does this have an impact on other parts of your life such as relationships with family, friends or work colleagues, or your physical or mental health?
- To what extent does your experience with suicide contribute to your sense of self? How is this different to your sense of self before suicide entered your life?

Length of Time Since Crisis

There are no hard and fast rules about the length of time that has passed since your experience with suicide however, suicide prevention professionals will generally provide the following recommendations based on their work with individuals touched by suicide:

- If you have lost a loved one by suicide** allow at least 12 months to pass before getting involved in suicide prevention.
- If you have made a suicide attempt** allow at least 6 months to pass since your most recent suicide attempt.

Reflection Points;

These recommendations are provided to help ensure individuals are not vulnerable when making a decision to participate. Levels of vulnerability can change over time as suicidality and grief may resurface.

- What would it be like to discuss your readiness to get involved in suicide prevention activities with a trusted person such as a friend, family member, mental health professional, or crisis line?
- Are there particular times when you know that you feel more vulnerable? This may be anniversary dates or birthdays, times of increased stress, or special events like Christmas or holidays.

Whats my motivation?

You may not be aware of this but mental health professionals undertake significant and ongoing training and supervision to ensure they are putting the interests of their client first.

Without these skills and reflection it is easy to allow personal thoughts and feelings to interfere with professional relationships. Individuals with lived experience also need to be aware of the motivation behind their involvement in suicide prevention activities as it helps them identify the right type of activity to be involved in given their motivation.

Again, this may change over time and with the ups and downs of life. It's not always an easy and straightforward process to identify your motivation to be involved in an activity. This requires self-reflection and is often best done by talking to a trusted confidant or a mental health professional.

Be gentle with yourself and don't judge or appraise your motivation: There are no right or wrong answers. One way of helping uncover your motivation is to ask yourself the question **'who will benefit from my involvement?'**

Sometimes involvement in suicide prevention activities can bring up unexpected emotions, feelings, and memories. It is important that you have a ready set of self-care strategies to draw on to nurture your wellbeing.

Sharing your story of suicide

Here are some useful points to assist you in deciding to share your personal experiences with suicide:

- Remember that if you do not want to make a comment, ask a question or share your story, you do not have to. While some people feel it is important to share, that is not true for everyone.
- Consider what information is useful for your audience to know. This will change depending on the situation and the audience. It is generally not helpful to discuss methods of suicide or suicide attempt (such as hanging or overdose), locations of suicide or suicide attempt (such as naming a particular bridge or building), and further details or graphic descriptions should generally be avoided.
- Be prepared for different personal perspectives on suicide and respect others opinions. Suicide is very complex and no two situations are the same. Suicide attempt survivors and those bereaved by suicide often approach the topic of suicide from very different places.
- If you are asked a question that you would prefer not to answer, it is perfectly acceptable to decline to answer, saying something like, "I appreciate your interest/concern/curiosity, but I hope you understand that I don't feel comfortable discussing that."
- Before you share a story of how you have been touched by suicide, consider how other people involved in the story or connected to the deceased/subject may feel about the details being discussed in public. If possible, talk to these people before you speak publicly about the suicide or suicide attempt.

Remember that suicide is very complex and responsibility for suicide prevention does not rest with any one individual alone.



24/7 Support:

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - (call) 1800-273-8255
Crisis Text Line - (text) CNQR to 741 741