

BREAKING THE SILENCE

Celia Taylor is passionate about getting people talking to each other. She dares us all to be courageous enough to start a conversation that may save a life.

Celia believes in talking openly and calmly about suicide. The health professional, collaborator, career coach and educator has now chosen to work towards its prevention. Her mission is to create communities where people are not afraid to talk to each other about suicide.

Unlike the road toll, our nation's suicide rate of, on average, eight deaths each day is hidden from view.

"Road safety has been a big part of our lives for over 30 years. There are always ads on TV, road signs, statistics in newspapers – it is a big deal. When I started to look at the statistics for suicide, it seemed it is a much bigger problem than road safety yet, has a lot of stigma attached to it. It is also put down to mental ill-health when in fact about half of the people who die by suicide have no history of a mental illness. Whatever they're experiencing, they're simply unable to cope with it. They may not want to die as such, they just want it all to stop."

Celia's own life experiences have linked her directly with suicide and she is quick to observe that nearly everyone has their own story of an experience of suicide and that no one is immune.

"I had four people very close to me either attempt, or die by suicide over 20 months and that jolted me into action as you might imagine."

She chose to learn more and was asked to work for Roses In The Ocean. A large part of the not-for-profit organisation's strategy is to encourage people with lived experience of suicide to share their story to assist others understand and demystify the subject and to give people the courage to speak about it openly. The community-led campaign helps to address suicide at all levels.

"A lived experience person is someone who experiences suicidal thoughts, someone who's survived one or more attempts, or has been bereaved by suicide – and that doesn't need to be close family, it can be friends, your boss, anyone you care about – or who has cared for someone who is suicidal."



The stories stop people in their tracks. "They make people realise that these survivors are just like them, their sister, their mother or their friend and they're not bad or selfish people, they're just helpless and hopeless at that time." The organisation works in many ways across socio-economic groups, ages and cultures – each with their own unique way of viewing this incredibly complex issue. The personal stories of survivors unite people and cross boundaries.

"I think just about everyone in Australia knows someone who has thought about it, has died by suicide or who has survived it or any combination of the above, it's just that we don't talk about it because it's scary and I want to change that."

WARNING: This story contains themes of suicide. If this raises issues for you, call Lifeline on 13 11 14

We ask Celia how do you start a conversation around suicide?

- Familiarise yourself with warning signs such as changes in someone's mood or behaviour. Use your intuition and then take the courage to start the conversation that may save a life. The bottom line is, you have to break out of your comfort zone.
- Start by tackling the situation head-on with language that isn't loaded. For example, start with something like:

"You must be in a pretty bad place right now, it's really scary, I imagine. Are you having thoughts about suicide or self-harm?"

If you get those words out, the person you're concerned about will mostly reply with a yes.

Then you can say something like: "Wow that must be hard for you."

Don't ask loaded questions, make judgemental statements, or act shocked. Stay calm and supportive and try not to do anything that could possibly make them withdraw.

Then, you need to ask if they have a plan. If they say yes, and they also have the means to carry out that plan, then they are in serious trouble and you need an immediate intervention. Continue to reassure them that all you're doing is trying to find out whether they are safe.

Suggest something like: "How about we go to see your GP or what if I come along with you to the emergency room and stay with you until you find someone you feel comfortable with."

The facts:

Australia recorded 3,046 deaths due to suicide in 2018. (ABS)

This means more than eight deaths by suicide each day in Australia.

Deaths by suicide in Australia among males are three times higher than females.

The suicide rate amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is more than double the national rate.

For every death by suicide, it is estimated that as many as 30 people attempt to end their lives equating to approximately 65,300 suicide attempts each year.

(SOURCE LIFELINE)

"TAKE THE COURAGE TO START THE CONVERSATION THAT MAY SAVE A LIFE."

- While it's very scary to make that approach, it's not complicated – talk to the person, find out where they're at and then act in a way which is appropriate. Don't rush out and have red fire engines and sirens, work out a gentle approach, not only for the individual concerned, but for the neighbourhood and the community.
- Recognise where danger really exists and act immediately. Statistics show that the more people have thought about and planned for suicide, the more likely it is to happen. In that case, it's appropriate to say: "I'm finding this really worrying and I'd like to find you another option." This is important because research shows that people who are contemplating suicide like to know that their options won't been taken away.
- Provide ongoing support. One survivor I work with says that he wakes up every day and decides to live, that's how much suicide is in his head. It's not always the case that you feel suicidal, there is an intervention and it all goes away. In some cases, that happens, but in many cases it does not and the person has to deal with it in any way they can for the rest of their lives. We can all be there to support them.

#storiesstrong

WHO TO CONTACT

Lifeline 13 11 14

Beyond Blue 1300 22 4636

www.beyondblue.org.au

Roses In the Ocean

www.rosesintheocean.com.au

Suicide Call Back Service

1300 659 467

Emergency 000

LEGAL DISCLAIMER: Please note that the information provided in this article is for general information only. It is NOT intended to be a substitute for personal financial advice from qualified practitioners. If you have concerns regarding your financial or mental health please seek professional advice.

This article is part of the #storiesstrong suicide prevention campaign which highlights a series of twenty articles developed by a diverse range of people with lived experience of suicide and experts in the field.

Stories Are Strong is an initiative of the **Place-Based Suicide Prevention Trials** project which is jointly funded by the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services and Gippsland PHN.

For more information visit **www.gphn.org.au**

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Gippsland PHN acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the traditional owners of country throughout Victoria and their continuing connection to land, sea and community. We pay our respects to them, their cultures and their elders past and present. We also recognise, respect and affirm the central role played in our work by people with lived experience, their families and/or carers. Gippsland PHN is committed to providing inclusive services and work environments where people of all backgrounds, sexualities, genders, cultures, spiritual beliefs, age, bodies and abilities are valued, supported and celebrated.

