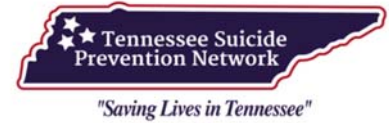


can you hear me?



stories of people who have survived suicidal thoughts & attempts

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What I Need From You When I Talk About My Suicidal Ideation

B.L. Acker is a 40-year-old mother of three. She has survived physical, mental, emotional and sexual abuse, a failed marriage and a long engagement imploded by my partner's repeated infidelities. She is the author of "Unlovable: A Story of Abuse and Depression from Someone Drowning in the Abyss" and contributes to The Mighty, a blog focused on firsthand experiences of disability, disease and mental illness. This article was originally posted on The Mighty on 8/6/2016.

I'd like to begin by stating I am not currently suicidal.

I am writing not about any plan to kill myself, but rather about those lingering thoughts that haunt not only me, but others suffering from depression as well. Suicidal ideation is a taboo topic, not allowed in most groups for fear of triggering others and being misunderstood by anyone who has not suffered themselves.

Most people who have depression know these feelings well. It's that little voice, that devil on your shoulder, that constant companion who overstays their welcome like an unwanted house guest. It internalizes everything in my life and makes me feel helpless, my life hopeless. It is the constant weight on my chest controlling my every breath, the elephant in the room I cannot ignore.

There are times I greet that little demon on my shoulder as I would an old friend. It has been there more consistently than any friendship and has been the only one to offer any real "solution" to my continuous suffering. I know, however, this demon is a bully. It does not care for me and is not looking out for my best interests. It is ever present, always badgering, forever insistent that giving up is the only way to stop the pain.

That demon is the personification of all the trauma and abuses I have endured. It wants me to give up. It wants me to fail. It wants to win.

I cannot tell you the number of times over the years I have written out my goodbyes to people I loved, apologizing for being me, the mess I am. I apologize for not being strong enough, good enough, for just not being enough. I have cried, "No more. No mas. Please, make all this pain stop." I have begged for those I loved to not give me another thought because I'm truly not worth it.



Image created by Chris Maxwell

TSPN works across the state to eliminate the stigma of suicide and educate communities about the warning signs of suicide, with the ultimate goal of reducing suicide rates in the state of Tennessee.

TSPN's continued success is due in large part to volunteers willing to donate their time and energy.

If you would like to volunteer with TSPN, please call (615) 297-1077 or e-mail tspn@tspn.org.

What I Need From You When I Talk About My Suicidal Ideation (continued)

I admittedly have daydreamed about acting on my thoughts many times. I imagine those final moments, knowing my pain would finally be over, drifting away. Where other people fantasize about far off, white sandy beaches or beautiful crisp nights under a starry sky, my bliss is simply a world where I am no longer suffering and no longer in pain. When life feels unbearable, a piece of me longs to surrender to that inner voice, to say, "You win!" and just fade away.

Anyone who has not walked in my shoes cannot understand what it's like to constantly battle my own brain, my own thoughts and emotions. They cannot comprehend having an inner voice who is always poking at me, telling me I'm not enough, that life will never get better and that this pain will never stop. When I've spent years in constant torment, any escape seems almost blissful.

I'm constantly haunted by these feelings while simultaneously being afraid to speak about them. The hardest part about having these feelings is that I've never been able to talk openly about them. The moment I verbalize having these thoughts, even if I do not intend to act on them, there's the very real fear people will panic me for my own safety. People are comfortable with me suffering in silence, but panic when any of the despair I feel every day spills out. Rather than let me acknowledge and discuss these feelings, some will ultimately try to use my vulnerability against me.

Perhaps worse than those who want to lock me away out of panic are the naysayers and the minimizers. Those who have never suffered through depression assume expressing these thoughts is akin to having a pity party. If I even bring up these thoughts, some people accuse me of wanting to take the "coward's way out." I'm accused of being a drama queen. Some people swear I'm not serious or even dare me to follow through, declaring I only want attention.



Others cannot grasp I'd even consider giving up on life. They assure me my life cannot possibly be as horrible as it seems right now. They toss out clichés about there being a rainbow after the storm, encourage me to keep my head up or that things can only go up from here.

There needs to be a middle ground where everyone feeling this way, myself included, can openly discuss our feelings, without fear of judgment, rejection or being locked away against our will for using one of those trigger words that make others uncomfortable. Thinking about suicide does not always mean we are actively planning to kill ourselves. Finding bliss in the thought of there being an end to our suffering does not mean we intend to follow through with it. Many times suicides occur because someone has been suffering alone, without a voice, for so long that their demons begin to make sense. If left alone with our demons long enough, some will succumb to their will.

Those who want to talk are still trying to survive their battles. Suicide often occurs when someone loses the will to talk or to fight. Listening non-judgmentally to us venting our feelings of hopelessness and helplessness, while moderately uncomfortable to you, may save our lives in the long run. It lets us know we are not alone and validates our voices.

We would not be reaching out if we did not want help. We would not be speaking up if we didn't want to fight, want to survive. We're putting our trust in you by letting you see us at our most vulnerable. Please, do not let us down.

30 Ways to Creatively Engage With Your Illness

Alexandra Ellen of Australia wrote this article for *The Mighty* and currently manages her own blog "Breaking Stigma" at alexandraellen.com. The author is a youth minister and part-time student studying a Master of Arts in ministry.

It can be easy to lose interest in life when you're consumed with pain, depression and other awful symptoms. But I've found that engaging with my illnesses in creative ways is empowering.

You don't have to be the next Van Gough, Ansel Adams, Sylvia Plath, PewDiePie or Alicia Keys to be creative. I have compiled a list of "creative" things you can have a go at, even if you think you suck.

By creative, I mean expressing yourself in an imaginative, artistic, innovative, inspirational, personal or unique way. You can "creatively engage" with your illness by using any creative medium to:

- Process the pain and grief your illness has caused.
- Externalize overwhelming feelings.
- Articulate acceptance.
- Rest and relax.
- Create awareness about your illness.
- Reach out for support.
- Distract yourself for a while.
- Innovate a way to re-engage with an activity your illness has prevented you from doing.
- Encourage others to persevere.
- Show others they're not alone in their illness.
- Remind yourself that you have hope.
- Share your story and experience.
- Reveal your resilience and strength.
- Ask for support.
- Project positivity.
- Express gratitude.
- Break stigma.

- WE MUST NOT CONFUSE EXPRESSING PAIN WITH LACK OF STRENGTH. -

WHEN WE CRY OUT,

IT IS NOT FOR ATTENTION BUT TO ENGAGE THE TRIBE'S INNATE ABILITY TO CONNECT

AND HEAL.

WHEN WE TEACH OUR CHILDREN, OUR STUDENTS,

OUR SOLDIERS TO FIGHT PAIN SILENTLY, WE CUT THEM OFF FROM HELP.

WE WEAKEN THEM ...

AND US. WE WERE NOT MADE TO ENDURE PAIN IN SILENCE.

FIGHT #SUICIDE - SPEAK UP, YELL, SCREAM AND,

MOST IMPORTANTLY, HEAR THE PAIN.

- DR. BART ANDREWS -

Image by Chris Maxwell

30 Ways to Creatively Engage With Your Illness (continued)

Here's a list of 30 ways you can engage creatively with your illness.

1. Go for a stroll in the park, a walk on the beach or simply sit in your sunny backyard and take a few pictures.
2. Pick a photo you've taken or download a free stock image and add the cheesiest quote you can find (or your favorite quote or verse from Scripture).
3. Type and print encouraging statements with fun fonts to put on your wall.
4. Print your favorite family or holiday photos and make a collage, or make a scrapbook with those holiday and baby photos.
5. Give coloring books a try. The adult coloring book fad has taken the world by storm. Have you tried it yet?
6. Communicate with pictures. Visualize how you feel and what it's like to live with your illness and paint or draw it.
7. Experiment! Paint, sketch and blend with different mediums. Most variety shops sell pastels (oil, soft and hard), charcoal, paint (acrylic, watercolor and oil) and canvas pads. Experimenting is fun and can be a great distraction.
8. I'm an awful drawer, but it's fun to sketch or create stick-figure comics.
9. Sing! Too scared to try karaoke? You can now download karaoke apps onto your phone or tablet to take "singing in the shower" to the next level.
10. Pick up the musical instrument you haven't played in years. Most of us have a recorder hidden at the back of our wardrobe.
11. Write a song.
12. Don't have a musical bone in your body? Try changing the lyrics to a song or nursery rhyme.
13. Create music playlists for every occasion.
14. Make up an interpretive dance — I can never go past Vanessa Carlton's "A Thousand Miles."
15. Write a short story.
16. Create a character you can relate to and write a monologue, one-act play, radio script or a short film to explore and communicate the character's journey.
17. Start a journal/diary, blog or a video journal. And you don't have to publish it for the world to see.
18. Write a poem. If you don't "do poetry," you could always start with a simple haiku or limerick.
19. Write a letter to yourself.
20. Turn statistics, research and (accurate) medical information into an infographic.
21. Put on a cute apron and be a master chef by cooking your favorite cuisine or experimenting with a classic dish.
22. Create the next paralympic sport. If there is a physical activity/sport you love, but can no longer play it due to your illness, come up with an adaptation that fits your physical limitations.
23. Knit! You can never have too many scarves, beanies or comfort blankets.
24. Give yourself alter ego life and make a sock puppet.
25. If you're a gamer and can code, create a game related to your illness. I dream of playing an arcade game called "The Angry Uterus."
26. Design a personal tattoo (which is in no way a commitment to get a tattoo).
27. Make some awareness jewelry.
28. Design a t-shirt with an awareness message. You can never have too many awareness t-shirts! (Although my mother would disagree.)

29. Be pretty and expressive by experimenting with makeup and nail art.

30. Download a meme generator and amuse yourself.



The most important thing to remember is not to be a perfectionist. It's not about the finished product; it's about engaging with your illness, disease or disability in a creative way.

In the short term, being creative will help you relax, decrease tension and give you another way to communicate. The long-term benefits of developing this habit is often insight, acceptance and healing.

Suicide Anonymous

Suicide Anonymous (SA) is a self-help program based on the model of Alcoholics Anonymous. It provides a safe environment for people to share their struggles with suicide and to develop strategies for recovery from suicidal preoccupation and behavior.

Suicidal people do not have safe places to talk honestly about their struggles with suicide. The stigma towards suicide pervades every segment of our society, including religious organizations and even the mental health field. SA, therefore, exists to offer a support system for survivors, to make a distinction between the suicide attempt and the person involved, to cast off the societal stigma that too often plagues the survivor, and to develop strategies for mutual support and healing.

During each meeting, a chairperson presents topics and members share their experiences or simply listen. Members also provide updates about how they are dealing with their suicidal impulses. Talking openly about suicide with people who understand the problem lessens the shame and stigma, combats isolation, and shows that it is safe to reach out for support in a crisis. In sharing their stories, members overcome the shame and stigma of a life of struggle with suicide. Meanwhile, listeners identify with the story or break through denial of the extent of their own struggles.

New participants pick experienced members to guide them through the Twelve Steps model. They also exchange phone numbers with group members as a resource for crises between meetings. Members learn to reach out to fellow members for support in a suicidal crisis. They also get to experience the other end of a suicide crisis.

Members also select bottom-line behaviors for themselves. These are component behaviors of suicidality like hoarding pills, suicidal fantasies, compulsively driving through cemeteries, etc.. Members commit to stop bottom-line behaviors one day at a time , and these behaviors may change with progress in recovery.



Meeting times in Tennessee	Skype /phone available
Every Sunday, 6:30 PM Central / 7:30 PM Eastern Room 223, Hope Presbyterian Church 8500 Walnut Grove Road Cordova, TN 38018	Yes (e-mail suicide.anonymous0811@gmail.com one hour prior to meeting start)
Every Thursday, 5:30 PM Central / 6:30 PM Eastern Psychological Trauma & Wellness Center 5158 Stage Road, Suite 120 Memphis, TN 38134	No
Third Tuesday, 6 PM Central / 7 PM Eastern Room 111, Cornerstone of Recovery 4726 Alcoa Highway Louisville, TN 37777	No

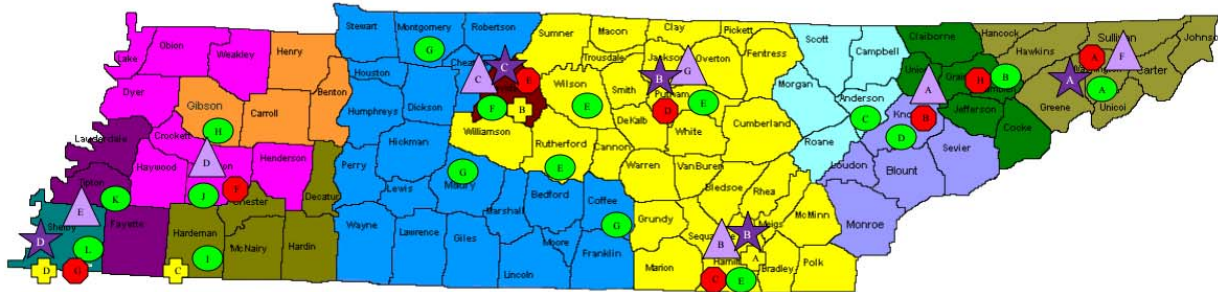
The SA website suicideanonymous.net features information on groups outside Tennessee with Skype/phone capability. The site also offers the full text of the *Little Book*, the guiding document of Suicide Anonymous, which discusses the problem of suicide addiction from the viewpoint of the person affected.

Interested parties may also contact the group directly at info@suicideanonymous.net or (901) 654-7673.

"can you hear me?" wants your articles, poetry, prose, and artwork for the next issue and the ones to come. We'll also need suggestions and recommendations on how we can make it better.

If there's a piece you want to submit to the newsletter, send it to tspn@tspn.org with the subject line "CYMH Submission".

Crisis Resources in Your Area



CRISIS TEAMS – CRISIS STABILIZATION UNITS – REGIONAL MENTAL HEALTH INSTITUTES – MEDICALLY MONITORED WITHDRAWAL MANAGEMENT (detox)

Mobile Crisis Teams

- A Frontier Health
- B Cherokee Health Systems
- C Ridgeview Psychiatric Hospital & Center
- D Helen Ross McNabb
- E Volunteer Behavioral Health
- F Mental Health Co-Operative
- G Centerstone Community MHC
- H Carey Counseling Center
- I Quinco Community MHC
- J Pathways of Tennessee
- K Professional Care Services
- L Alliance Healthcare Services

Crisis Stabilization Units/Walk-in Center

- A Frontier Health
- B Helen Ross McNabb Center
- C Volunteer Behavioral Health – Chattanooga
- D Volunteer Behavioral Health – Cookeville
- E Mental Health Co-Operative
- F Pathways of Tennessee
- G Alliance Healthcare Services
- H Cherokee Health Systems

RMHI

- A Moccasin Bend Mental Health Institute
- B Middle TN Mental Health Institute
- C Western Mental Health Institute
- D Memphis Mental Health Institute

MMWM

- A Helen Ross McNabb
- B CADAS
- C Buffalo Valley
- D Pathways
- E Alliance Healthcare Services
- F Frontier
- G Volunteer

Respite Services

- A Frontier Health
- B Volunteer Behavioral Health
- C Mental Health Co-Operative
- D Alliance Healthcare Services

8-24-16

This map of crisis response teams and facilities is provided to TSPN courtesy of Melissa Sparks, Director of the Office of Crisis Services and Suicide Prevention within the Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse's Division of Mental Health Services. More information about these facilities is available from Ms. Sparks at (615) 253-4641 or melissa.sparks@tn.gov.

Need Help Right Now?

Feelings of hopelessness, feeling trapped, feeling like a burden to others, increased alcohol or drug consumption, sleeping too little or too much, and withdrawing or feeling isolated from others are signs that you or a loved one may need help now.

If you or a loved one are feeling suicidal, please seek help immediately. Call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK or visit www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org.

