

## Readiness to be involved in using your lived experience for suicide research

Many people are drawn to “do something” with their lived experience of suicide. Whether you have lived with your own suicidal ideation, have made an attempt on your life, cared for a loved one through a suicidal crisis or have been bereaved through suicide, the insights and wisdom gained through that experience can have the potential power to positively impact suicide prevention and help to contribute, to what we continue to understand and learn about suicide.

Having a lived experience of suicide can change us quite profoundly. For some, it can leave them feeling devastated and confused about what it means, while for others, it may be a time to reflect on life and its value. Finding the balance between being able to think constructively about your experience and managing overwhelming emotions can be tricky, and the thought of feeling vulnerable can be daunting for some.

There may come a time when some people with a lived experience of suicide, feel that they would like to contribute to suicide prevention through participation in research.

If you are considering this, you may not be sure of how your lived experience can be of value, what it might mean to you both emotionally and mentally, and what the implications could be for your family and friends. We assure you, that participating in research and sharing your lived experience and the knowledge you have found through your experience will contribute evidence and knowledge to assist suicide prevention efforts all over. Your experience is valid and valuable as a source of academic evidence and there is power in contributing to suicide research.

Of course, the most important consideration is that you are ready, and that your involvement is a rewarding and positive experience. It is without question difficult for some to talk and think about suicide, especially those with a lived experience. We understand how profoundly your life can be affected, how feelings can change over time or vary depending perhaps on the time of year, or around the time of significant dates.

It's important to realise that being involved in research projects on suicide prevention means that **you are able to choose the nature and frequency of your involvement, and you are free to withdraw at any point during a study.**

We hope that working through this document will help you clarify your thoughts about taking part in research related to suicide prevention, particularly involving your lived experience of suicide.



## Has it been enough time?

The more we work with people with a lived experience of suicide, the more it becomes apparent that there is no rule book to follow on what is the right time to get involved after your experience. For some people, they are ready to become involved just months after their lived experience, while for others, it can take years.

Other important considerations are your personal level of vulnerability, the networks of support you have in place and your self-care rituals. Levels of vulnerability can change over time as suicidality and grief may resurface and when this happens, it is important to know that stepping back and withdrawing from a suicide research project at that time is the right thing to do.

Here are some things to consider in thinking about your readiness to be involved in suicide research:

What impact has talking about your lived experience of suicide had on you mentally, emotionally, physically in recent times?

Are there particular times when you know you feel more vulnerable?

Are you aware of any particular words, conversations or anything else that can be emotional triggers for you?

What is your energy and drive like after you discuss your experience? Does it take time to recover or is it lessening as you talk more about it?

Are you able to speak about your experience with suicide without feeling teary, anxious, overwhelmed with grief or anger?

Have you spoken about your desire to take part in suicide research with your own network of family and friends? If yes, reflect on those conversations and possible impacts. If no, what are your thoughts on doing so?

## Why do you want to get involved?

It's not always easy to identify your motivation for wanting to participate in suicide research. You need to look inwards and perhaps discuss how you feel with a close family member or friend to help you. Try not to be critical or judgmental when working through your motivation, it's your unique experience, so there is no set rule. Ask yourself "who is going to benefit from my involvement"? Usually you will find that you get a mix of yourself and your community benefiting from your involvement and that's a very common outcome.

Which motivation is the most important to you? Do you believe being involved in suicide prevention research will meet your current motivation?

When becoming involved in suicide research, you must be prepared that people will have different perspectives on suicide. It's a complex issue and no two experiences are the same for many different reasons.

Those who have attempted suicide and those who are bereaved from suicide, tend to view suicide from different perspectives and this can create strong and mixed emotions. There is always the need to respect all views and accept that no one perspective is more relevant or important than the other.

Have you experienced differing views on suicide to your own? How have you reacted? Has your ability to see differing views changed as time has moved on?

## What is the next step?

It's extremely important that you understand it's perfectly alright **at any time** during participation in suicide research that **you can withdraw from a study** and say that the time is not right for you.

We understand this, for some, may be a tough call and we know that like many others, part of your motivation for being involved may be to ensure others don't have to go through a lived experience of suicide.

We also recognise you may want to see a "good" come out of such a difficult personal experience and this might drive your determination to continue when you aren't doing very well. It is so important, however, to consider the impact your involvement may be having on yourself and your loved ones.

We are dealing with a complex issue and no one person has the responsibility to stop it, **we prevent suicide as a community**.

When you decide you are ready, you should make sure you **read and understand the Participant Information Sheet** that you will be provided with as part of the research project. This will contain vital information about what the study is for and what you will be asked to do. If you don't understand the information or you want more details, please get in touch with the research team listed on the Information Sheet.

One other important thing to be aware of is that researchers use specific language when talking about their projects. It may feel like they are speaking a foreign language at times. If you are unsure about anything that is said to you or sent to you, speak up and ask the researchers for clarification. There is no need to feel intimidated by a researcher or anyone in academia. Remember that they are just people too and many researchers, in the area of suicide, also have a lived experience of suicide. Your knowledge, expertise and experience is invaluable.

When you know what will be asked of you, think about this in conjunction with your answers above and whether or not the type of study is right for you.

As we said, it is completely up to you if you would like to participate in any research and you do not have to take part in every research project you hear about.

**Remember, suicide research and prevention is a community effort.**

*If you choose to participate in a suicide research project, please remember the following resources where you can get support.*

### **Crisis line contacts (available 24/7)**

Suicide Call Back Service 1300 65 94 67  
[www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au](http://www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au)

Lifeline 13 11 14 [www.lifeline.org.au](http://www.lifeline.org.au)

Mensline 1300 78 99 78  
[www.mensline.org.au](http://www.mensline.org.au)

