

in Research

Many people are drawn to 'do something' with their lived experience of suicide. Whether you have lived with your own thoughts of suicide, have made an attempt on your life, supported a loved one through a suicidal crisis or have been bereaved through suicide, the insights and wisdom gained through that experience have the potential to positively impact the way we approach suicide prevention and contribute significantly to what we continue to understand and learn about suicide.

People will have varying levels of interest in engaging in research ranging from participating in research surveys and interviews, reviewing and analysing research data, or being involved as a guest or client investigator. There are also roles within research institutions for designated researchers who have a lived experience of suicide.

The degree to which you choose to engage in research will depend on a range of factors including your interest in research, evaluation and data, your interest in contributing to the evidence base around suicide and maybe even the other skills, expertise and qualifications you might hold. In all of these instances however your readiness to draw on your lived experience of suicide for the purpose of contributing to or partnering in research is an important consideration for you to make. Only you can really know if you are ready, and if you are, the nature of your involvement and the type of research you would like to engage in.

Having a lived experience of suicide can have quite a profound impact on us as individuals, sometimes changing our priorities, interests and even vocations. For some, it can leave us 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 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.

READINESS TO BE INVOLVED

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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 the networks of support you have in place and your self-care rituals. Levels of vulnerability can change over time for all people and this is the same for those of us with a lived experience of suicide. Experiencing suicidal thoughts or complex grief from suicide bereavement 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 absolutely okay if you feel it is the best thing for you 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 your emotional, mental, physical wellbeing in recent times?

Are there particular times when you know you feel more vulnerable, when your lived experience is just that bit closer to the surface than at other times?

Are you aware of any particular words, conversations or anything else that can cause a strong emotional response for you?

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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 all the time, 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?

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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 someone you trust 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. Everyone's experience is unique, valuable and valued. 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?

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WHAT IS THE NEXT STEP?

It's extremely important that you understand it's perfectly alright at any time during participation or partnership 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 it may not be the best for your wellbeing at the time. 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 strive to prevent suicide as a community.

When you decide you are ready, it is important to make sure you read and understand the Participant Information Sheet that you will be provided with as part of a 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, always arrange to speak with the research team leading the project.

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 or sent to you, please ask the researchers for clarification. There is no need to feel intimidated by a researcher or anyone in academia. Remember that they are normal 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.

CRISIS LINE CONTACTS (24/7)

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

Suicide Callback Service
1300 65 94 67
suicidecallbackservice.org.au

Lifeline
13 11 14
lifeline.org.au

Mensline
1300 78 99 78
mensline.org.au

QLife
1800 184 527
qlife.org.au
(3pm-midnight)

☎ 1300 411 461

✉ enquiries@rosesintheocean.com.au

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