

Staying Solid with **SAFE** Yarning.....

Suicide **A**wareness **F**or **E**veryone



Painting by Iris Windmar

Brother, Sister it is ok to talk....

Suicide Prevention for Aboriginal People

Thank You and Acknowledgement

- Sincere appreciation to Linda Sharman and Jodie Davis at Wheatbelt Aboriginal Health Service, and Leanne Moody, Wheatbelt Mental Health Service, and Elaine Ryder, an Elder of Northam.
- Their compassion, thoughtfulness and expertise saw this Safe and Solid Session born.
- OneLife also appreciates the contribution of many others who have helped to get this session to this stage.

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A Few Things Before We Start

- Respect for confidentiality in this session
- Respect for each other
- Don't talk over each other
- Everyone has the right to be heard, or to listen quietly if they choose
- If you don't get along with everyone in the room you have the choice to stay or leave peacefully
- If you are feeling not so good, you may like to leave when some things are said – please do let someone here know, so you can be supported and given help



Put your differences aside to prevent suicide

Why a culturally safe program?

- Safe space to discuss important and distressing issues – affirming and empowering
- Part of the process of restoration and self determination of social and emotional health for Aboriginal people after impacts of history, colonization and assimilation
- Take account of Aboriginal worldview and cultural beliefs (T Westerman)



Aboriginal Terms of Reference

Why?



“As Noongar people have a holistic culture, services and programs should aim to empower them through education about their social, emotional, physical, mental, societal, environmental, spiritual and governmental aspects of health and well being”



Things That Affect Aboriginal People

(Terms of Reference to explain what makes modern Aboriginal life more complex)

1. **A Holistic Culture** – A mutual understanding between People of the Land that all things are connected – spiritual, country, family.....

2. **Ways of Doing** – Relating to practices within a culture who are;
 - A traditional people who practice and maintain culture and all its elements
 - A cultural people with mainstream commitments and demands
 - A culture which values the handing on of traditional and contemporary information to future generations

3. **Ways of Being** – Relating to who People of the Land are today as a result of;
 - Traditional thought processes and lifestyle
 - The 1st Australians, historical interactions with the advent of Europeans to Australia, and past Government laws that had negative impacts upon our ways
 - How to deal with the hurts of the past, and where to from here as a culture?

Staying Solid with **SAFE** Yarning

Suicide Awareness is for Everyone

What will you get from these two hours?



- More confidence to have a **SAFE** Yarn
- Learning about the warning signs of suicide – when should you be worried and when to get help
- Learning how to talk to people, who may be suicidal, about their feelings and their worries
- Learning what other help is available for you to contact – **AND DOING IT**





Difficult Times

- Some things in people's lives may put them at risk of suicide. We need to support people when these things happen. **Difficult times** can include;
- Sadness and depression in the family.
- Harmful use of alcohol or other drugs.
- Trouble with family and relationships.
- Sexual, emotional or physical abuse.
- Family and community members being suicidal or hurting themselves.
- Loss of a loved one.
- Problems with the law.
- No Money.
- Ill health and exhaustion
- The pressure and stress of being a carer
- Incarceration, being in prison
- Readjusting after release from prison
- When a child is taken away.
- After coming from psychiatric treatment

(Reference from *Communities.wa.gov.au*)



Myths about suicide



MYTH: You have to be mentally ill or depressed to even think about suicide.

FACT:

- Most people have thought of suicide from time to time.
- People who think about suicide are in pain and unwell but may not have a mental illness



Myths about suicide



MYTH: People who talk about suicide are not serious about doing it.

FACT:

- It is very important that everyone who says they feel suicidal be taken seriously and acknowledged
- Many people who have suicided, have told someone or acted as if life is not worth living
- People who talk about suicide should be encouraged to talk further and seek professional support.



Myths about suicide



MYTH: Once a person has made a serious suicide attempt, that person probably won't do it again.

FACT:

- People who have seriously tried to kill themselves are much more likely to die by suicide than everyone else.



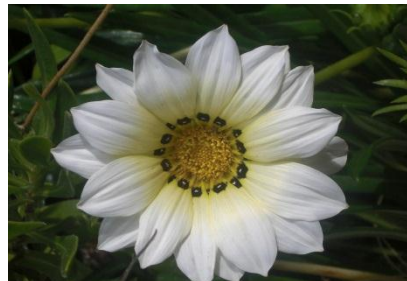
Myths about suicide



MYTH: If a person is serious about killing themselves then there is nothing you can do.

FACT:

- Someone may feel low or distressed for longer but the actual suicidal thoughts can be very short term.
- Giving emotional support at the right time is important, as your attention may save their life.



Myths about suicide

MYTH: People who are suicidal want to die.

FACT:

- People who are suicidal feel confused and need relief from strong emotional pain.
- Many people with suicidal thoughts feel that part of them wants to live and part of them wants to die.
- What they do not want, is to live with the pain or isolation they are feeling right now.



Myths about suicide



MYTH: After someone I know has gone through a “low” time or a suicide crisis, I don’t have to worry anymore if they seem to get well quickly

FACT: A sudden positive change in mood could mean two different things;

- The person has made a decision to continue living,

OR

- The person seems to be at peace because they have decided in their own mind that suicide will stop the emotional pain.

- There is a risk that someone who may have been feeling deeply depressed is feeling less depressed, and may now feel they have the energy to act on their suicidal thoughts .

- This is why ongoing support and linking to professional services can help.

Myths about suicide



MYTH: If someone asks me to keep their suicidal thoughts or plans a secret, I must keep that promise.

FACT:

- It's not safe to keep this kind of secret
- Explain to the person that you are taking what they say very seriously and you cannot keep this secret.
- You need to tell others in order to get help for the person, but you do not tell anyone who does not need to know, to protect the person's privacy.

Myths about suicide

MYTH: Only experts can prevent suicide.

FACT:

- Many people could die if someone is not on the spot to give emergency emotional first aid and support at a time of a suicide crisis. BUT professional help is important
- Emotional First Aid is the attention you give a person when they are having an emotional crisis – like having a safe yarn and staying until professional help is available



Suicide Prevention is Everybody's Business

Myths about suicide



MYTH: Suicides happen;

- Without any warning
- Are spontaneous acts
- People keep their suicide plans to themselves.

FACT:

- Studies show that about eight out of ten people give warning if they are intending to suicide
- People do not often keep their suicide plans to themselves
- When they do tell others, often the warning signs are not recognised

Staying Solid with **SAFE** Yarning

- Most people don't openly share their feelings, especially when they're hurting.
- Aboriginal men often don't share - but Brother, it is ok for you to ask and to share your thoughts!
- Your aim is to get the person who is hurting to get help
- Don't wait for a sign - just trust your instincts.
- It may feel hard to ask someone if they really want to end their life right now.
- Being wrong may be shame but being right means **SAFE** yarning could save a life.



Staying **SOLID** & **SAFE** Yourself

- **Be persistent** in seeking help for your loved one
- **Do** take care of yourself. If you are exhausted as well you can not help the person you are worried about
- **Do not** blame yourself
- **Do** ask others for help – family and professionals





So what sorts of things
may give us a clue
that someone is feeling unwell
or **Winyarn**
and that we need to take notice?....



Signs to look for



- A person who is thinking about suicide will usually give clues or signs to those around them that indicate that they are distressed.
- The following is a list of signs that people might say or do when they are feeling Winyarn, to let others know how they feel.

Remember – There may be more than one sign



Physical signs

- Not interested in anything and can't have a laugh anymore
- Less energy or enthusiasm for things
- Less interested in personal hygiene or appearance
- Big changes to sleeping patterns – too much or too little
- Less interested in intimacy
- Sudden or big changes in eating habits – either loss of appetite or increase in appetite. Losing or gaining weight.
- Increase in sickness, minor aches



Behaviours

- Unexplained crying or emotional outbursts
- Alcohol or drug misuse
- Risk-taking that is not normal for the person (for example, driving recklessly).
- Fighting and/or breaking the law
- Withdrawing or not socialising with others
- Not doing activities that they used to love doing
- **Prior suicidal behaviour – they've tried before**
- Self-harming
- Seeming like they are trying to sort things out
- Giving things away, especially things that have special meaning to the person
- Organising or talking about who will get what after they are gone. Who will look after my kids?
- Writing suicide note/goodbye letters to people.
- Telling your family that you love them more often than normal. Going to visit family when you wouldn't normally.



Thoughts



- **Escape** – *"I can't take this anymore"*
- **No future** – *"What's the point? Things are never going to get any better"*
- **Guilt** – *"It's all my fault, I'm to blame"*
- **Alone** – *"I'm on my own ... no-one cares about me"*
- **Damaged** – *"I am damaged, no good... I'll never be the same"*
- **Helpless** – *"Nothing I do matters", "It's out of my control", "They'll be better off without me"*
- **Not thinking straight**
- **Talking about suicide or death**
- **Planning for suicide**



Feelings



- Winyarn
- Sad
- Can't be bothered with things/don't care
- Shame
- Angry
- Worthless
- Powerless
- Lonely/Isolated
- **Don't feel right – not interested in life, family**
- **Hopeless**



(This may happen more for Aboriginal men because their traditional role has been taken away.

Some don't feel they have a role in life)

Staying Solid with **SAFE** Yarning

- If you notice any of these changes in the thoughts, feelings or behaviour of the person you are concerned about, **it is important to ask** the person if they are Ok and whether he/she has been thinking about suicide.
- Sometimes people are worried that they might 'put the idea of suicide into the person's head' if they ask about suicide. This is not the case — by asking, you will either confirm your hunch or the person will tell you that he/she isn't suicidal.





Staying Solid with **SAFE** Yarning

- Sometimes having a cuppa and a yarn can really help. The person will tell you they feel better and their unhelpful thoughts have gone away
- This is still a good time to try and encourage them to get professional help, or let them know you can ask someone to contact them.
- Talk about things that help and things that don't help.
- Talk about who they trust to talk with if they feel this way again.
- Give them some useful phone numbers and find a phone they can use to make a call
- Offer that you will follow up, and make sure you do.





SO NOW WE HAVE A
MORE INFORMED IDEA
OF SOME SUICIDE FACTS
WE CAN MOVE ON TO
LEARNING HOW TO
HAVE A **SAFE YARN**



What if you think the person is
considering suicide?



Think about staying

SOLID

In the following pages, you will see that solid means..

SOLID instead of Winyarn



- **S**tart with a yarn
- **O**ffer a quiet private safe space
- **L**isten and speak in a calm and non judgemental way
- **I**dentify what the risk is
- **D**ecide who else needs to get involved to get help





Start with a yarn

- If you are worried that someone you know is hurting or is thinking about suicide, it is important that you **stop and give that person a chance to yarn** about it with someone they trust.
- If you can't talk with them for cultural or family reasons, **help them find a person that they can talk with.**
- Stay with them if possible until they link up.





Organize a quiet and private space

- Find a **place that the person feels safe** and private to talk with you
- It may be at home or outside or at a special place in nature – **it is not a good idea to be far from other people** until you know exactly how they are feeling.
- Assess the danger - Is it low, medium or high risk. Remember to assess the risk before taking a person on their own
- Where possible you might want to let someone else know what you are doing and if they need to contact someone or get help whilst you have a **SAFE** yarn.
- More support may be needed. If possible try to have other supporters helping you.





Listen & speak in a calm and non-judgmental way

- You need to **help them feel safe** and reassured.
- **Stay calm** and don't get agitated, angry or upset. Tell them that you care about them and you want to help as they do not seem themselves.
- **Listen** carefully
- Let them know that **thoughts of suicide will often go away** but they may still need some help



Identify what the risk is.



- If someone says they are thinking about suicide – you must take it seriously.
- Find out if they have made a plan to take their life.
- Ask if they have decided how they will end their lives or if they have taken any steps to do this.

If they have, it is very important that you do NOT leave them alone and do NOT use guilt or threats to prevent suicide.



Decide who else needs to get involved to help




- Help them get immediate professional help
- GP – make an appointment and go with them
- For Hospital. Call 000 or go with them to Emergency
- local Mental Health Service after hours Rural Link – **1800 552 002**
- Emergency help lines
 - Lifeline on 13 11 14 (free from a mobile)
 - 1800 RUOKDAY
 - Suicide Call Back Service - 1300 659 467
- Contact trusted friends or family to help also
- In some cases you may need to call the police – this may feel hard but if it saves a life it is the right thing to do. (*Remember you do not have to give your name*)

If possible encourage the person to speak directly to the professional helper whilst you stay with them.

It is important to build a support team around the person as soon as possible

What if the person wont stay and yarn?

- Try to talk with them about ways to be safe – where will they go next, who will they be spending time with
- It's called a **safety plan** and sometimes doing this and getting the person to make a promise with you to keep to it can help in the short term. You can use your hand as a map for this.

- Try to get their OK to tell someone else – although if you are really worried you may have to tell them that you will talking to someone yourself
- Follow Up – maybe work with family on a plan

Family Response Tools



- Arrange 24 hour watch for someone who is not feeling well –ask 3 or 4 people they trust to take turns being with them
- Identify a family member they agree to speak with if not feeling safe
- Make sure family have crisis contact numbers and a plan for action if person becomes unsafe
- Visit, to show that you care. Sit with them for as long as needed. Always return to make sure ok





Remember

- People who are thinking about suicide are hurting and may give clues or show signs to others.
- In other cases, there may be no warning. They may stay silent.
- It is very important that you regularly yarn with family, friends and colleagues and take a bit of time to ask them how they are going, and if they are hurting keep trying to get them help
- Don't say things you can't deliver or follow through
- Don't leave obvious aids to suicide lying around



Support For Yourself

- Hearing someone else's worries or problems can be distressing for you too
- Find your own support person or avenues of support
- Don't blame yourself or take too much responsibility. You don't own their problems but you can guide them
- Go to a doctor yourself if you are worried

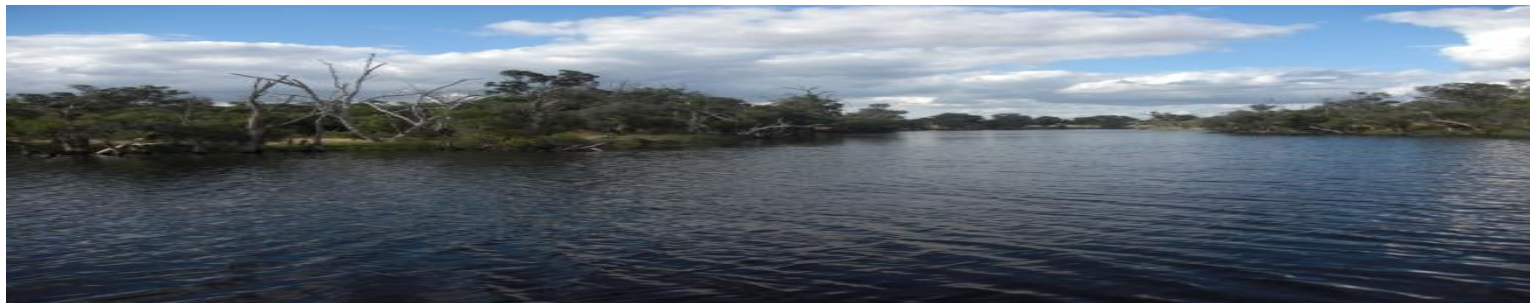




Where to from here?

- Continue to improve this training package as more communities and families share in it
- Engage local Nyoongar support workers, and aim for opportunities to yarn and practice individually and in groups
- Talk about the Resource Card and ways it can be used to ask friends and family difficult questions about their thoughts and feelings
- Prepare a local 'Feeling Winyarn' Booklet for different communities
- Focus groups and further cultural endorsement is part of this process

We can all help to make a difference in suicide prevention



Some acknowledgements

- **Wheatbelt Aboriginal Health Service**
- Many other Wheatbelt Services and organisations
- Noongar Elders from all over the South-west region of Western Australia – thank you for all your wisdom, caring, and willingness to share ideas to help all your mob.

- Other community members, both Noongar and Wadjela
- RUOK day website
- Lifeline
- Suicide Prevention Australia
- Salvos Suicide Prevention
- Tracy Westerman – selected readings
- “Preventing Suicide Among Indigenous Australians”
– Silburn, Glaskin, Henry and Drew
- Communities.wa.gov.au

Endorsed by the Ministerial Council for Suicide Prevention for WA





Thank you to Tim and Deana Flowers for spectacular photography