Pain to Possibilities®

Tell Me More

Humanizing Suicidal Thoughts

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If you or someone you know is experiencing a mental health crisis or in danger of immediate self-harm or suicide, please seek immediate help from a qualified professional or contact local emergency services.

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DEDICATION

To any person who has ever or will ever sit alone with heavy thoughts.
To any person unsure of what to do or where to turn when things feel hopeless.
To any person who knows someone who has or will suffer in silence.
To any person who has been or would like to be of support to those who need it.
To those of you who believe that loss of life to suicide is preventable.
To those of you who are committed to showing up with care, presence, and love, even when you are not sure how.
To those of you who are determined and passionate about not losing one more to suicide.
To those of you who have admiration and appreciation for what it means to be human and our humanity.

This is also for the version of me, as a young person and as an adult, who needed a book like this, and for all the versions of you who still do.

May it help us to move from Pain to Possibilities® with hope and grace. This is our moment and opportunity.

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements

This book has been inspired, shaped, and brought to life through the hearts, minds, and lived experiences of so many people. To those who sat with me through hard to share but necessary conversations, I thank you.

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To my children, who continue to teach me the beauty and complexity of being unapologetically human. You are my muses and my why!

To my parents, you have provided the love and space that has allowed me to become who I am today. You are the anchors that keep me grounded and the heartbeats behind my boldest dreams.

To Debbie, you have illuminated my professional path in ways that words cannot fully capture. You are my North Star. The sacred mirror that reflects my truth with grace and honesty. You generously invested your wisdom, compassion, and a deep understanding in me, even when we were strangers. Now I am privileged to have you as a best friend and guide. I look forward to continuing our mission of humanizing this world together.

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To every client, friend, and stranger who entrusted me with their stories, struggle, and strength, please know that you have shaped this work in more ways than you may ever realize. Over the years, I have carried your voices with me. They have been infused into every word written, every concept clarified, and every effort to humanize what has far too often been hidden, ignored, or misunderstood. Your vulnerabilities have deepened my own practice, and your trust has called me to rise to it with integrity and care.

To the people I have not met yet and those who have been touched by suicide, I hope this book offers a pathway for you to heal and honor those you have lost. Every life lost that I hear of no matter how close or far, takes the air from my lungs and causes my heart to ache. I shed a tear for every single one. Please know you are not alone in your grief. Your loss continues to drive the energy and movement of #NotOneMore.

This book is a reminder that we do not do this work alone. Nor do we hurt or heal alone. Ours is a shared journey.

With a heart and soul full of gratitude,

Sajel

Foreword

I have spent my life immersed in the worlds of psychology, human behavior, and spiritual experience—formally practicing since 2007. The first nine years of my career were shaped by working alongside people whose lives were marked by interpersonal and gender-based violence. In those darkest moments, suicide often appeared to them as a way out—a relief from suffering that seemed endless.

As a human-first professional, you learn to hold hope in your hands like something sacred. You trust that the small actions you take—the steady presence you offer, the space you hold—matter, even if you never see the full ripple of their impact. And yet, no matter how skillfully or compassionately we practice, there are times when someone we once supported makes the devastating choice to end their life. I have known that loss personally. It stays with you.

Even so, I hold onto the hope that what we shared gave them more time—more moments of grace, connection, or peace—than they might have otherwise had. And that hope fuels my work still: the belief that small acts of compassion can keep someone tethered to life, if only for a little while longer.

Pain doesn't disappear when we ignore it or stop speaking its name. In fact, when we push pain into the shadows, it grows larger, darker, and becomes harder to face. This is one of the first truths that connected me with Sajel Bellon when we met in 2019. Both of us steeped in psychology, both of us aware that the field, as it was, had become something less than it could be—less human, less courageous, less whole.

Sajel had completed her Doctorate in Educational Leadership specializing in Organizational Behavior and was confronting the profound dehumanization within corporate systems, where the messiness of real human experience was too often ignored or hidden away. She had stepped into clinical practice and began working with frontline public safety professionals—police officers, firefighters, paramedics—people who face death, tragedy, and trauma as part of their daily work.

In supporting them, Sajel witnessed their suffering in the aftermath of lives lost and lives saved, and the moral questions that haunted them: *Why am I still here when others are not? Do I deserve to be? Should I be? How can I go on when they couldn't?*

These are not easy questions to ask, let alone answer. They are rarely spoken aloud—but they should be. And that is where Sajel's work is so deeply transformative.

Her mission is not only to support first responders and crisis workers, but to help all of us find the courage to hold space for these hard, human conversations, conversations about suicide. To listen without panic. To

respond without dismissal. To remain present without reaching for quick fixes or false comforts.

Sajel's work reminds us that thoughts of suicide are not a moral failing or a clinical emergency to be solved at all costs, but part of the vast, complicated landscape of being human. You do not have to be someone's therapist to sit with them in this space. You do not have to carry the responsibility for their life. What you can do—what Sajel will help you learn to do—is to show up, human to human, and have a real conversation about something that is very real for someone else, their pain that is leading them to thoughts of escape.

In the pages that follow, Sajel Bellon offers practical, compassionate guidance for how we can have those conversations. My hope is that you take her words to heart. Let them challenge you, comfort you, and call you forward—so that together, we can keep these conversations alive and do what Sajel describes as moving from Pain to Possibilities®.

Kimberly Pereira, M.Ed., RP, CCC
Psychotherapist
Owner & Director of Activated Global Inc.

Introduction

As you are holding this book, there is something in you that knows this conversation matters and is important.

Maybe you have had thoughts that you have never shared with anyone because you are embarrassed or scared. Maybe someone you love is hurting and you are not sure how to connect with them. Maybe you know how pain can take over someone's life and leave them feeling helpless or hopeless. Or maybe you are just tired. Tired of the silence, the shame, and the systems that have been looking the other way while so many suffer in the shadows alone, when they don't have to.

This book is for you, whether you are a parent, partner, sibling, colleague, or friend. This book offers tools, language, and grounding strategies to help you stay steady, present, and human in a space that can feel overwhelming, lonely, and is often avoided.

We live in a world where suicidal thoughts are hidden behind forced smiles and busy calendars. Suicidal thinking is often misunderstood by loved ones, minimized in conversations, met with panic, or even worse, silenced. We have been conditioned to believe that we only need to be concerned or respond when

things are really bad. But as the sad statistics tell us, this is often too late.

Think about it: What difference would it make if suicidal thoughts were no longer misunderstood or silenced because we shifted our thinking and understanding of them?

What if suicidal thoughts were no longer something we had to be fearful of or hide? What if we were able to understand suicidal thinking from perspectives that are more aligned with our natural human instincts? What if we had the common language and tools to express ourselves better? These would defy the current stigmas and shame that alienate people experiencing suicidal thoughts.

This book is a diversion from the typical crisis and clinical how-to manuals that discuss the topic of suicide prevention. This is an invitation to rethink and reconsider the way we talk about pain and suicidal thoughts, while also introducing a primary prevention strategy that starts at the beginning of life and is naturally built into our journey.

Whether you have wrestled with suicidal thoughts yourself, or stood beside someone who has, I hope these pages will offer alternatives on how we can shift these experiences for everyone. The content covers the perspectives from both sides of the conversation.

So, if you are reading this and something in your heart feels pulled or compelled… please share it with as many

other people as you can.

The true power of this book lies in the ability for it to be in the hands, minds, and hearts of as many communities as possible. Ideally, it will create a collective shift in how we think and respond to suicidal thoughts as a primary prevention strategy.

If you have ever walked through these shadows with someone you love… If you have wanted to do *something* but did not know where to begin… Or if you simply believe that each one of us can connect, comfort, and change lives then…we can start right here, together.

If you or someone know is at immediate risk of self-harm or in need of suicidal support, please seek emergency care in your local area or refer to the resources provided at the end of the book.

CHAPTER 1

Just Show Up

This is a call to action for change with compassion, conversation, and connection.

What Matters Most

1. **We have a shared responsibility to care.**
2. **Shame hurts, but connection heals.**
3. **Being human means, you already have what it takes to make a difference.**

Tell Me More

We all have a role to play in preventing suicide, regardless of our age, background, or training. The fact is, suicide prevention starts long before a crisis because it is about how we think, talk, and show up for each other in everyday life. Talking with care and curiosity can save lives. Together we need to replace stigma, shame, and silence with connection, compassion, and courage. Knowing how to talk about suicidal thoughts is a skill. We can all learn how to listen, respond, and support each other better by providing hope and care. Every honest conversation makes a difference.

Let's Humanize It

Suicide prevention does not start when someone is planning or in the midst of taking action. Let's not wait for the crisis or when it's too late. Nor is suicide prevention solely the responsibility of mental health professionals. We all share this responsibility, whether we are the one who is suffering or the one who can intervene as early as possible. Every single one of us, regardless of our age, demographic, or background, has the ability to say something or do something to help humanize the experience. **Primary prevention** starts with how we think, how we talk, and how we show up for ourselves and each other.

Many of us can feel uncomfortable, nervous, or afraid of saying or doing the wrong thing. We may not have any professional training, so we may think how could we possibly say or do the *right* thing? The stakes feel way too high, and so can the pressure. It is because of this kind of discomfort that it is easier to avoid and even stigmatize anything connected to the topic of suicide, including the people suffering. This is where the situation becomes the most dangerous and risky. The fear of judgment and stigma keeps too many people silent and isolates them even more.

In order to reduce our losses to suicide, we have to **humanize** the experience right from the beginning and throughout our lives. Humanizing means restoring what is most natural in us as humans by acting more respectfully and civilly towards each other. We need to

rethink and relearn what we have been taught and socially conditioned to believe about suicidal thoughts and the associated stigmas. Whether it is at school, work, within faith (or religious) communities, or at home, people need to feel safe enough to not hide their pain in shame or in fear of being judged by other people.

Replacing the socially conditioned stigmas with caring curiosity, compassion, and connection creates the opportunity for us to move from Pain to Possibilities® realizing a healthier collective experience and hopeful culture. Feeling comfortable sharing our thoughts during our difficult times depends on squashing the stigmas we hold around suicidal thinking. Feeling more comfortable about engaging in suicidal thought conversations is reliant on feeling more confident and competent in how to connect by knowing what to say or do. These are skills we can learn, develop, and practice as we dive deeper into these chapters. It is up to us as a society and individuals to decide how we are going to respond to these calls for help, hope, and support.

By tapping into our humanity, we can lead with compassion, care, and courage. Leaning into the full experience of life and being human means that we recognize that life has its ups and downs, dark and light moments, pains and possibilities. We can expect that there will always be struggles. Remember that time keeps rolling, and that this too shall pass. Even if it doesn't feel that way, we can have a knowing that we are not alone and that someone will be there to support or guide us through if we need it.

Together, let's work toward a world where we all know that struggle and strain are natural parts of our stories, knowing that we have a shared responsibility in breaking or preventing silence, so we don't ever feel alone. We can continue to perpetuate the stigmas, shame, and silent struggles, increasing the losses to suicide. Or we can say **#NotOneMore**, believing that every life matters, that every conversation counts and can be the difference between life and death!