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International Men's Day: Talking about male suicide



By [Stefan Dalton](#) 27 Nov 2023

As part of International Men's Day, this post contains information about male suicide that some readers may find distressing.

As part of Movember focussing on men's health, men across campus will share their approaches to wellbeing. Hear from Stefan Dalton cognitive behavioural therapist and a doctoral researcher in psychology at Brunel.

I am a cognitive behavioural therapist and whilst thinking about what to share in this post, I decided it may be useful to include some thoughts regarding suicide and comments from male clients who have shown courage to share their feelings and seek professional help in times of extreme distress.

Everybody is different and has different thoughts and emotions in response to everyday situations. As men, we might find it easier to lie, or play down, or dismiss our feelings because we feel ashamed or that it might impede our status, independence, or masculinity. But it is ok to talk. As men, it's important to know each of our issues are valid.

The most recent statistics show males account for 74% of all suicides (Office for National Statistics, 2022).

Ending your own life might feel like it is the only option. But ask yourself, 'Has there been moments when these feelings were less or more intense?', 'How were you able to cope in the past if this is something you have experienced before?', and 'In what situations have you shown strength?' Exploring your thoughts and specific feelings surrounding why you have thoughts of ending your own life can have insightful results.

Having intrusive thoughts about being better off dead can be a natural response to a stressful situation or crisis.

In fact, throughout our lifetime many of us may have already had thoughts like this. When these thoughts become more frequent, they can become more distressing, and it would be worth pausing and taking the time to try and understand in what situations are these thoughts occurring. It is important to acknowledge that it is the meaning we place on our thoughts (i.e., 'What does thinking I'm better off dead say about me?', 'Am I weak?', 'What if my thoughts are true?') that may cause significant distress, making us ruminate on these thoughts further, resulting in even more distress and perpetuating the cycle. As men, we may be less likely to voice these thoughts. In moments of extreme distress, feeling suicidal may be more about wanting a feeling or situation to end rather than wanting to take your life. It may be time to consider seeking support.

There are many ways talking to a professional can help. One such way is cognitive behavioural therapy, which is a platform for you to explore your thoughts, why strong emotions endure, and importantly, a platform to learn new skills and new healthier strategies to handle intense emotions. One male client learnt to identify situations that were linked to intrusive thoughts and learnt skills for handling strong emotional reactions and feelings of worthlessness which resolved over time.

When seeking help, it's normal as a man to feel ashamed, embarrassed, isolated, exposed, scared, or presume other people, namely other men, are stronger in their thoughts and emotions than you are. But remember, these are all ideas that happen in our heads. For instance, male clients have shared that they expected people would dismiss them, think they are weak, or find their situation funny. Yet, many were surprised that people, especially other men, can be very supportive.

Suicide is not an easy topic to talk about, but we can look out for ourselves by sharing feelings and asking questions, which validates our feelings.

If you're a man and are contemplating ending your own life because you want a situation to stop, or feel no way out, I encourage you to find one person who you trust, friend or professional, and take the first step in sharing any thoughts you are having that you find distressing.

It may help to find social events you can join and spend time with any family, friends, and partners. Make time for yourself to relax and recharge. Prioritise your wellbeing and most importantly, be compassionate and kind to yourself.

As an experienced therapist, I have worked with male clients that have overcome intense feelings and it's important to urge even though thoughts and feelings of ending your own life may persist, suicide is preventable.

It is time we men start talking about suicide and acknowledge the courage it takes for us to talk about our feelings – it's ok to be vulnerable and open to help when we need it.

Remember, suicide is preventable.

There is always emergency help at hand. In any moments of extreme distress and thoughts of ending your life, call 999 or the Samaritans. The information is provided below.

- Emergency services: call 999
- Samaritans: call 116 123; email jo@samaritans.org; text +44 (0)7725 90909
- SHOUT: text 85258

At Brunel, to support this year's theme for international men's day we encourage our men to [post on the padlet here](#) a photo, story or message about where you are with your mental health.

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