

'It's ok to talk about suicide'

Community Awareness Walk 2018

Good morning everyone. Looking out at all of you on this cool, crisp early morning I feel totally overwhelmed but I also know: 'it is ok to talk about suicide!'

There is something so comforting to be surrounded by people we share so much with even though we might not know each other personally.

Yet, there's a deep sadness within us all.

Life will always be like a duel edged sword now - the depth of our grief at losing someone so special and loved so much by us to suicide is beyond measure, yet the comfort and peace we can feel by being here together is profound.

Thirteen years ago we lost Luke, our beautiful 21 year old son, brother, grandson, nephew and amazing friend to everyone who knew him. It was the end of life as we knew it and I most definitely did not believe that I would ever feel a sense of hope or happiness ever, ever again - there was not a chance!

We had experienced other serious tragedies in our lives but always had the underlying feeling that we would be happy again one day - but not this time. This was very different! The blackness, the darkness, the sadness is both all around and deep within, and is beyond measure!

Suicide was something that happened to other people. It was a scary word for something not understood and certainly not something that would happen to us - an average family with four young adult kids living in the suburbs of Melbourne. We'd had our issues of course bringing up teenagers and all that entails, including the anxiety experienced by young people. We thought everything was fairly normal in our family and that our experiences were pretty common to most families we knew.

So, how does a young, fun loving, incredibly compassionate and funny boy with the best sense of humour ever, come to the point of suicide? How does anyone get to that point for that matter?

And so the never ending guilt journey starts - as a parent, or a sibling, or a son or daughter, or a partner, or a friend - a journey of guilt I found all encompassing and one that I always thought would be unending.

However, somehow with the help of so many different people you manage to walk that journey one very small step at a time. It's with the support of very special people - friends, family and professional counsellors, in every aspect of your life that somehow you manage to stay afloat.

The connection you feel on a day like today just being with so many people who share your deep, deep pain gives us all an overwhelming feeling of support and comfort - the duel edged sword again!

I think connection is a powerful word for me. Being strongly connected with the wonderful people at Support After Suicide has been the absolute key to my survival over the past 13 years. Being with both the counselling staff and all the people who's suffering you share because of the suicide of a loved one has given me the strength to somehow go on and live a fulfilling life, and to continue to be able to talk about our son Luke and about his suicide.

The strength gained through this ongoing connection, along with the close ties with very special supportive, positive, loving friends and family is what has enabled both myself and our whole family to somehow feel a sense of peace with the questions that will never be answered, a sense of joy again and a sense of hope. These three feelings I did not ever expect to experience in my life again.

So on a day like today the overwhelming feeling is: 'you are not alone' and 'it is ok to talk about suicide'

The challenge, I believe, is to make it not only ok to talk about suicide here with fellow travellers but to be able to address the topic of suicide much more openly in the wider community. I think that is definitely happening slowly but surely and there has certainly been a huge shift in that regard since we lost Luke 13 years ago.

Hopefully, with days like this and by talking about suicide openly and indeed addressing the whole area of mental health on every level including the areas of huge need in our current system, we may see a change in those dreadful suicide statistics. Hopefully there will be less, instead of more, people like us standing here with our lives irrevocably changed forever by the suicide of someone very very precious to us.

Thank you.
Chris.