

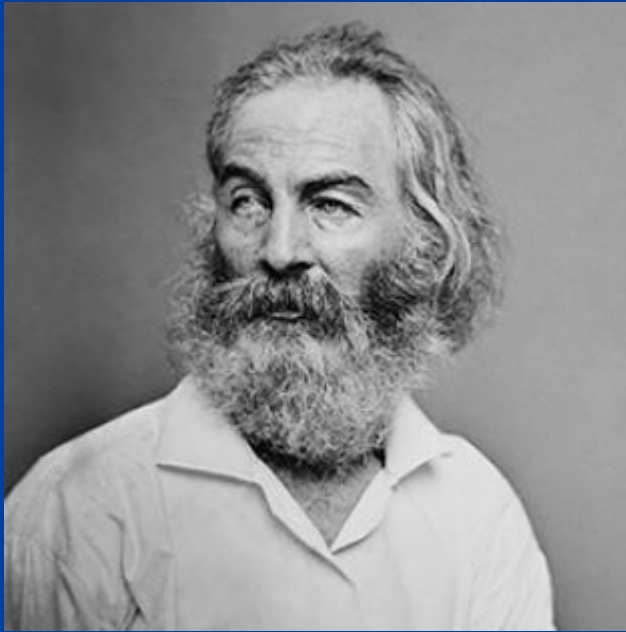
Loving Someone with Suicidal Thoughts

8th Vilnius Conference on
Suicide Intervention
Methods

Stacey Freedenthal, PhD, LCSW
December 8, 2023

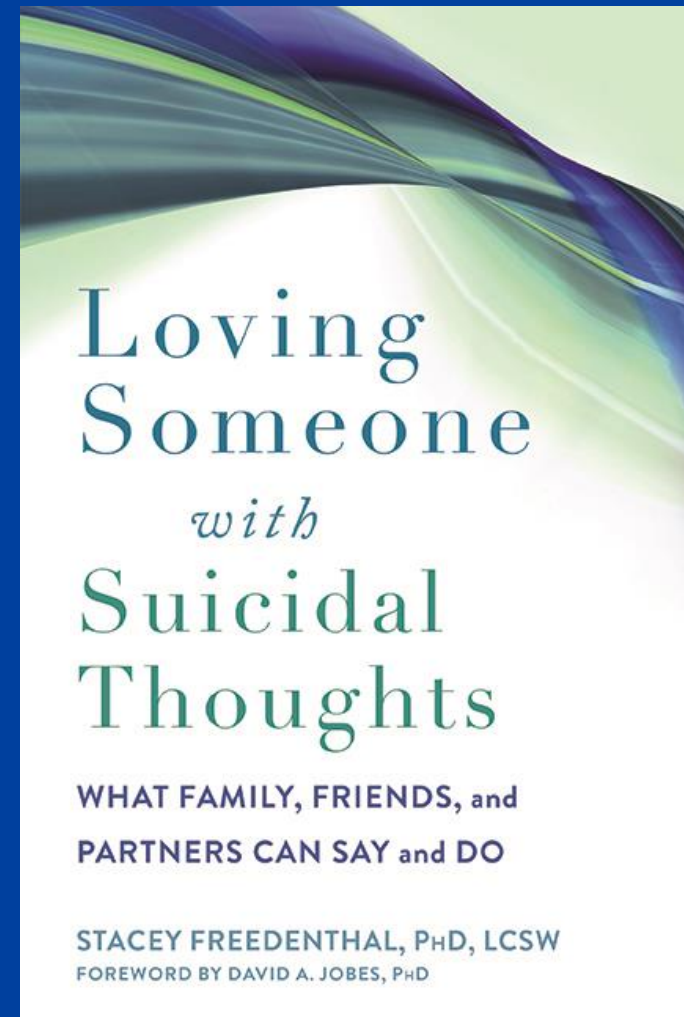
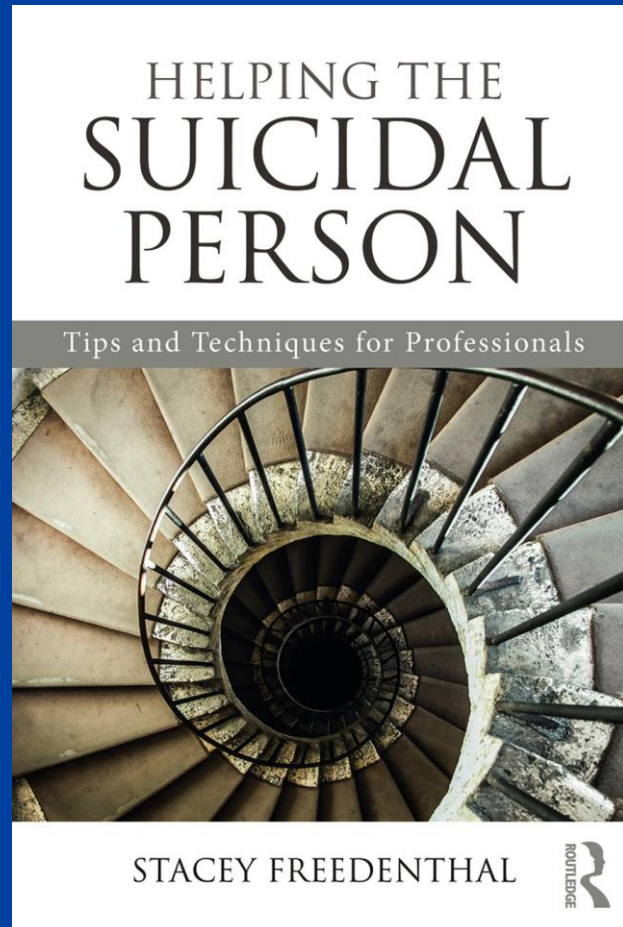
Agenda

- My Story
- Asking about Suicidal Thoughts
- What to Say and Do
- Challenges and Hopes



(I am large,
I contain
multitudes)

From "Song of Myself," by Walt Whitman



www.speakingofsuicide.com



“Nobody ever asked me...”

– Kevin Hines, attempt survivor

Many people hide
their suicidal
thoughts from
family, friends –
even from their
therapist.



Photo by Tabitha Turner on Unsplash



ASK



“I am consistently amazed at how many people flatly deny suicidal ideation when first asked, despite the presence of such ideation.”

*Shawn Shea, MD
The Practical Art of Suicide Assessment*

Beware of interrogating the suicidal person.

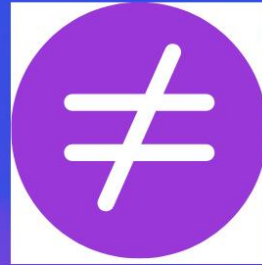
Checking off a person's
risk factors for suicide
does not help the person
to feel less pain.

Photo by aatlas on Pixabay



**Step into the
person's
darkness**

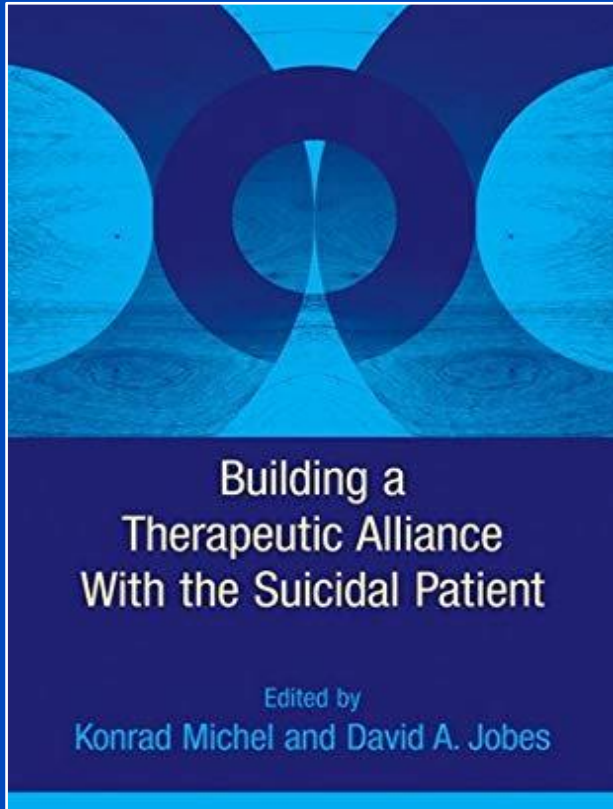
Brave Listening



giving advice... telling the person they're wrong
to feel the way they do... guiltting the person...
offering reassurance... lecturing... centering
your emotions of anger, sadness, or fear - or
otherwise trying *immediately* to change what
the person is saying, feeling, and thinking

BUT...

Invite the Story



- “Could you tell me how you got to the point that you wanted to kill yourself?”
- “I would like you to tell me the story of what led to the suicidal crisis. Just let me listen to you.”
- “I would like you to tell me in your own words how it came about that you attempted suicide.”



Ask about SI

Listen bravely

If not an emergency:

Safety planning

Help get help

**Involve others,
if possible**

Safety Planning

Step 1: Warning signs (thoughts, images, mood, situation, behavior) that a crisis may be developing:	
1.	_____
2.	_____
3.	_____
Step 2: Internal coping strategies – Things I can do to take my mind off my problems without contacting another person (relaxation technique, physical activity):	
1.	_____
2.	_____
3.	_____
Step 3: People and social settings that provide distraction:	
1. Name _____	Phone _____
2. Name _____	Phone _____
3. Place _____	4. Place _____
Step 4: People whom I can ask for help:	
1. Name _____	Phone _____
2. Name _____	Phone _____
3. Name _____	Phone _____
Step 5: Professionals or agencies I can contact during a crisis:	
1. Clinician Name _____	Phone _____
Clinician Pager or Emergency Contact # _____	
2. Clinician Name _____	Phone _____
Clinician Pager or Emergency Contact # _____	
3. Local Urgent Care Services _____	
Urgent Care Services Address _____	
Urgent Care Services Phone _____	
4. Suicide Prevention Lifeline Phone: 1-800-273-TALK (8255)	
Step 6: Making the environment safe:	
1.	_____
2.	_____
<small>Safety Plan Template ©2008 Barbara Stanley and Gregory K. Brown, is reprinted with the express permission of the authors. No portion of the Safety Plan Template may be reproduced without their express, written permission. You can contact the authors at bhs2@columbia.edu or gregbrown@mail.med.upenn.edu.</small>	
The one thing that is most important to me and worth living for is:	

1. Warning signs/triggers
2. Distraction techniques (alone)
3. People or places to provide distraction
4. People (non-professionals) to ask for help
5. Professionals and settings to call or go to for help
6. Ways to keep the environment safe (e.g., limiting access to lethal means)

SuicideSafetyPlan.com

Convey hope



Photo by Tiko Giorgardze on Unsplash



Photo by Taha Raef on Unsplash

**Stay
connected**

Challenges

- *Self-doubt*
- *Anger, burnout, etc.*
- *Power struggles*
- *Feeling manipulated*

Tend to Your Needs, Too



Photo by Tasha Jolley on Unsplash

- Get support
- Recognize your limitations
- Aim for self-compassion
- Remember hope

Thank you

Stacey Freedenthal, PhD, LCSW

Stacey.Freedenthal@du.edu

staceyfreedenthal.com

speakingofsuicide.com

@sfreedenthal – Twitter

Facebook.com/staceyfreedenthal



UNIVERSITY of
DENVER

GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

