

Suicide

In my experience, people can develop suicidal thoughts, feelings, impulses, urges, or gestures, for a variety of reasons that are often subjective and quite personal. However a common cause often relates to the individual desperately wanting to end some kind of prolonged emotional pain and suffering. The psychological pain reaches the point of being unbearable, and any escape seems preferable to one having to endure it any longer. In short, to a despairing mind devoid of any hope, suicide appears to be a legitimate option. However, it is important to keep in mind that suicide is a *permanent* solution to what might be a *temporary* problem. Suicide is irreversible. However, the issues that a person is dealing with – despite their tenacity or longstanding nature – might yet be overcome.

A less common cause of suicidal thinking involves what is sometimes called ‘rational’ or ‘philosophical’ suicide, related to a person despairing of a sense of meaning, purpose, or being overcome by a general senselessness about the world and their perceived place in it. This kind of suicidal ideation tends to emerge more from ‘existential’ thoughts and feelings (concerns related to existence), though it can also be helpful to explore these more philosophical issues as needed.

Risk Factors

A completed suicide is very difficult to predict, so all suicidal thoughts or feelings need to be taken seriously. Some especially significant risk factors include the following:

- A plan for suicide (thought has been given to how to end one’s life)
- Means to follow-through with plan for suicide
- Sense of overwhelming hopelessness or despair about the future
- Social isolation & lack of a support network
- The above, combined with impulsivity (can be heightened by drug or alcohol use)

If you or someone you love is experiencing suicidal thoughts and feelings, it is important to reach out for help. If you are at immediate risk, you should call 911 or get to a hospital where you can be kept safe until the crisis passes or until you get linked up with additional supports. I strongly encourage clients to talk about their suicidal thoughts and feelings.

