

CONTRACTING AROUND SUICIDE

WHAT I WOULD WANT A THERAPIST TO SAY TO ME

What are we here for?

We're not here for me to be sympathetic, although I will be. We're not here just for me to 'care', although I will care. We're not here just to 'remember the memories' and tell the story, although I'm sure that'll happen. We're not here for me to be a listening ear, although I will listen and I will do it to the best of my abilities. We're not here for me to wave a magic wand, although if I had one I would.

I am here to ally with your goal—the goal you're expressing by feeling suicidal—of reducing your distress. And sometimes it may not look like that's what I'm doing, because I won't respond the way you want me to or think I should. Sometimes I won't rescue you from your feelings, because I want to teach you ways of managing your feelings for yourself, and to do that in ways that will work for you in the long-term. There are lots of ways to reduce your distress in the short-term, like self-harm. But either they come at a cost—higher distress in the long-term—or they wear off. And then if it's me that's given you that pain relief, you'll be dependent on another shot from me. And that's going to be painful for the other 6 days of the week, and when I'm on holiday, or when we stop working together. I'm not up for short-term fixes that don't work in the long-term.

I'm committed to allying myself with your goal of reducing your distress. If you don't commit to reducing your distress, then there's nothing I can do to help you. But the fact you're feeling suicidal tells me that if necessary you will die to relieve your distress. So I think you're well motivated to do this work.

I cannot work with you and help you if you're not alive. So if you want to work with me, you have to stay alive. If I'm anxious all the time

about whether you're going to be alive later, I won't be very effective at helping you. Anxiety stops me being effective. So it will help me to help you if we work on relieving your distress in other ways other than by attempting suicide.

I know you're conflicted about wanting to die: that's the nature of being suicidal. Part of you wants to live, which is why you're here. And part of you wants to die—to make the pain go away. But what you're NOT conflicted about is wanting to relieve the pain. ALL of you wants to relieve the pain. You're just conflicted about the best of way of doing it.

I can help you find other ways that are more effective. Sometimes they take a little while to work and we have to be patient. But just because something hasn't worked *yet* doesn't mean to say it won't. There are lots of effective ways to relieve pain and if one doesn't work we'll find another: we don't give up.

The conflict in you about how to relieve that pain is a conflict in *you*. Let's not make it a conflict between *us*. Because *I am on your side*. I am allied to your goal of reducing your distress. So I will not fight you. Your choice to live or to die is your choice, not mine. I can't make you do either. The big question is not: 'live or die?' The big question is: 'how to reduce this pain?' Suicide is one way of doing that. But it just passes the pain onto other people.

I will help you relieve your distress; I will help you carry it; but I will not carry it for you. Do you want to work together to relieve your distress? I do.

by
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Spring