



PROFESSIONAL HYPNOTHERAPISTS OF AUSTRALIA INC

Guidance Note - Potential Suicidal Client



Each person that works in fields that are either aligned to, or involved in mental health must be prepared to receive clients who are experiencing significant stressors, suffering from a mental health condition, 'feeling down' or experiencing a general feeling of inability to cope. All of these issues can manifest themselves in different ways and with differing displays. In some cases, these displays can be very confronting for the practitioner.

As lay-hypnotherapists, we are neither qualified nor capable of diagnosing any mental health issue or condition. We are reliant on either the individual's self-diagnosis (placed into appropriate context of course) or the diagnosis of a mental or medical health professional. None the less, working within this field, we are by necessity attuned to people and what they are experiencing and this can mean that, at times, we are confronted with an individual that either claims openly, or indicates by action and demeanor, that they may be considering self-harm. Self-harm of course includes suicide.

The thought that someone may try to end their own life, or indeed when someone does take action in an attempt at suicide, can be upsetting, confronting and have longer-term issues on all involved with the person.

The purpose of this Guidance Note is to provide some guidance to PHA hypnotherapists on actions available or to be considered in these circumstances. **It must be noted that this is a nationally focussed document - consequently, each member should take steps to alert themselves of the local state/territory resources available and of the individual contact numbers for your jurisdiction.** Terminology, departmental names etc. vary from state-to-state-to-territory. Within the auspices of this document, generic phrasing will be used where necessary.

In the first instance and in all cases, the safety and well-being of the client is of paramount importance. Of course, this extends to any member of the public that contacts us in our role as hypnotherapists. For instance, if someone contacts a hypnotherapist to enquire about services and then discloses an intention to harm themselves, we do have a moral responsibility to render whatever assistance is possible.

In some instances, there does exist a natural temptation to draw judgement on whether the individual is actually 'serious' about attempting to end their own life. Indeed, it is not uncommon to hear others who are not related to the issue pass judgement such as, *'it is just a cry for attention'*. This may be the case but just as simply put; this may **NOT** be the case as well. Trained mental health professionals have a number of key indicators that they use to judge the likelihood of a person seriously considering self-harm/suicide but even in the case of these trained professionals, they will opt for the 'safe' option in the greater majority of instances. This involves taking action to ensure the safety of the individual.

There can also be a natural temptation to help by talking to the individual - typically, this is referred to as 'talking the person down'. This should only ever be undertaken by someone that is trained and competent to do so. As a lay-hypnotherapist, an individual is neither trained nor competent to attempt to engage the suicidal individual. Indeed, in many cases and with the very

best of intentions, the individual is likely to exacerbate the situation and cause more harm than good. By way of explanation, many people think that someone considering or bordering on suicidal actions is doing so because they feel that they have no-one that cares about them. In these instances, the temptation can be to tell the person that there are many people that love, care and want them in their lives. In fact, some people considering suicide are doing so (in part) because they conceive that they are a worry, burden and problem to all those people that do love and care for them. In these instances by reminding the person of these individuals, it is highlighting their initial concerns and adding credence and credibility to their plan to save these people that they do care about from the problems of worry, stress, concern etc. In this instance, adopting the strategy of telling the person how much others care about them would be likely to make matters worse.

Each State and Territory has facilities and departments devoted to caring for individuals suffering from mental health issues. This includes those exhibiting or displaying suicidal tendencies. As a general rule of thumb though, these departments are focussed toward the on-going treatment and care of these individuals and are not resourced to respond to emergency issues. It is helpful to know the numbers for these crisis teams and to establish at least an initial relationship with these departments. That way, if confronted with an ongoing issue, at least the hypnotherapist has someone to speak with regarding their concerns.

In emergency cases, when someone either states or indicates that they are going to 'end-it-all', it is strongly suggested that hypnotherapists do the following:

1. If possible, find out where the individual is right now.
2. If in session at the time, extract yourself from the room and alert someone to provide assistance. You should encourage the client to remain with you but be aware ***you cannot detain or restrain the individual.***
3. Ensure that you have their telephone (and if possible address) details handy.
4. If it is possible to get the assistance of someone else while the individual is on the line - do so and have that person call 000 (emergency number)
5. If no one else available to assist and as quickly as possible without cutting-off the individual, call 000.
6. Speak with Police and alert them to the following:
 - you are a professional hypnotherapists (provide Practice Name)
 - you have been contacted by a client who has disclosed intention to commit suicide
 - give: persons name, age, telephone number, address, current location
 - what the person said to indicate intention
 - request a 'WELFARE VISIT' to make certain the person is ok.

Police will take whatever action is necessary to locate and check on the person's welfare. The hypnotherapists should note down as much information as possible about the telephone call/disclosure made by the person, time, location, sound of their voice, what was said (by both parties) etc.

As a lay-hypnotherapist, there is little more than can be done and anything more done could make matters worse.

Finally, this topic should be raised during professional supervision. If the individual hypnotherapist feels stressed or impacted by this issue, then Professional Supervision should be sought as a matter of priority.