

CORRECTIONAL OASIS

A PUBLICATION OF DESERT WATERS CORRECTIONAL OUTREACH
A NON-PROFIT FOR THE WELL-BEING OF CORRECTIONAL STAFF AND THEIR FAMILIES

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This issue is dedicated to all correctional employees lost to suicide.

Suicide? NOT!

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Dear Correctional Worker:

Lately you've been thinking that life's too hard, that holding on is not worth the pain and hassle that often go with it. Your thoughts of "checking out" sometimes comfort you and sometimes scare you. They comfort you, because they seem like a friend who offers to assist you in a time of need. But they also scare you, because of the unknowns that go with suicide and because of its finality. You're not sure you want to take the road of no return. A part of you just hates giving up.

First of all, let me tell you that every year about 20% of the U.S. population thinks about killing themselves. Having thoughts of ending your life is not unusual. None of us likes to suffer. We all want solutions for our problems, relief for our pain. When cornered, we all want an "out."

I don't know what your circumstances are. But I gather that recent losses, failures or disappointments are threatening to take you over the edge. Perhaps your "significant other" informed you that the relationship is over. Maybe you crossed a line at work, and you're about to be exposed. You might be struggling with the embarrassment of yet another DUI. You may have made disastrous investments that wiped out your family's savings. Perhaps you were diagnosed with a disease which, in your mind at least, strips you of your dignity. And/or you might have inherited a family history of severe depression.

Whatever your situation, negative emotions and thoughts appear overwhelming. Sorrow, shame, self-hate, rage and fear threaten to suck you up into their

black hole. You have come to believe that nobody cares about you. A sense of worthlessness, hopelessness and powerlessness dominate your existence. You can no longer talk yourself out of the darkness. It's like your brainpower is dimmed and cobwebs clutter your mind. You feel exhausted. Your sleep is shot. You fly off the handle or you can barely hold back from balling. Your mind screams at you, "Loser! You don't have what it takes! It's over for you!"

Thoughts of death come camouflaged as a merciful escape.

You may be feeling a powerful urge to end your misery NOW. Please, hear me. If you see yourself in what I described above, go see a medical doctor *immediately*, even if that means going to the ER. We are tied into our body's chemistry. If your car's battery is out of juice, you'd recharge that battery. Why try to tough it out where your brain is concerned? If a doctor evaluates you and decides you need medication, please accept that. If side effects are persistently disturbing, ask for another type of pill. And, please, take your meds faithfully, as prescribed. Make that a priority, no matter how you feel.

Now, about your situation. Look for a reputable counselor to talk to about your heartache. When we're *that* down, our thinking is muddled. We despise ourselves for our failures. We are convinced

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From The Old Screw

HOLIDAY BLUES

The holidays are supposed to be a time of joy and loving. For many people this may be so, but for some it is not good at all. Correctional staff seems to have more than their fair share of sadness during the Holiday Season. I think part of the problem is the negative environment we work in every day.

During the holidays I thank God for watching over me, and I can't help but think back on friends and family that are no more. I start thinking of Officers that are no longer with us, and how some of them had their final role call. I remember the ones that took their own way out and all the pain and sadness this caused to the friends and loved ones left behind. It's the saddest thing to get a call or go into work and be asked, "Hey, did you hear about Joe?" You try to think, "Were there any signs?" Then you remember. Joe had been very quiet lately and seemed so sad. You may have asked Joe in passing if everything was OK, but then went your own way after he mumbled something about being fine.

During the Holiday Season watch your loved ones and your fellow workers. Pay attention to any mood swings. Don't be afraid to ask how they're doing. If they seem down, but they tell you that they're doing fine or that it's none of your business, this would tell you there's something wrong. Let the person know that you are there for them. Try to talk them into seeing a professional if you think that they're

struggling. No, you are not a shrink, but they may listen to you better than they would someone else.

If you are having thoughts that no one cares about you, remember that there are people who DO CARE and will listen to you for as long as you need to talk. They'll also talk to you as long as you need, and help you get professional help.

If the burden is getting to be too heavy and you don't know where to turn, Desert Waters' Ventline will be there 24/7 throughout the Holiday Season and after. At the end of the phone line or the email there will be someone who cares about you.

One of the bad things about suicide is that once people start on that path, not too many have the chance to change their mind. What do you have to lose if you call and talk to someone for a while? I believe that Desert Waters can help staff and their families. Please call. Thirty minutes, an hour or even longer is not a long time out of eternity.

Look, I don't claim to know it all. I never have. But taking your own way out is not the answer. You might be surprised at the number of people here who want to be of help to you.

Take care,

The Old Screw

WHEN YOU FEAR SOMEONE MAY TAKE THEIR OWN LIFE

Reprinted with permission from the American Foundation of Suicide Prevention, www.afsp.org.

Most suicides give some warning of their intentions. The most effective way to prevent a friend or loved one from taking their life is to recognize when someone is at risk, take the warning signs seriously and know how to respond.

The depression and emotional crises that so often precede suicides are—in most cases—both recognizable and treatable.

Take It Seriously

- Seventy-five percent of all suicides give some warning of their intentions to a friend or family member.

- All suicide threats and attempts must be taken seriously.

Be Willing to Listen

- Take the initiative to ask what is troubling them and persist to overcome any reluctance to talk about it.
- If professional help is indicated, the person you care about is more apt to follow such a recommendation if you have listened to him or her.
- If your friend or loved one is depressed, don't be afraid to ask whether he or she is considering suicide, or even if they have a particular plan or method in mind.

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Suicide? NOT!

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that there is no forgiveness for what we have done, or that we have no viable options other than suicide. We feel hopeless about anyone else loving us ever again or about our feeling good again. We feel powerless to do what is required to get our lives back on track. Please trust me that your seeming worthlessness, hopelessness and helplessness are distortions, lies that stem from false assumptions and a chemically-depleted mind.

You ARE worth loving, even if others don't seem to think so. Your worth is based on your sacred spiritual core. It has nothing to do with what you look like, who wants to be with you, how smart or "successful" you are, or how much money you have in the bank.

Infinitely better alternatives to suicide abound. It's just that your vision is clouded right now and you can't spot these choices yet. Resolution can be around the corner. If only you persevere long enough and do your part, life-affirming options will appear. Let the hope for that help you hold on.

You'll watch your sense of powerlessness melt away as you gradually become willing to learn more effective ways to tackle challenges in your life and to quell storms in your emotions. Getting through this crisis will result in the addition of many new and valuable tools in your toolbox.

To overcome the darkness, you also need the fuel of

love. Look for a community that will accept you as unconditionally as humanly possible. For some this may be a Twelve-Step group, such as Alcoholics Anonymous. For others it may be a faith community or a Divorce Recovery group. Or you might reach out to trusted friends and members of your family.

Good can come out of bad. Invaluable lessons can be learned as a result of dealing with suffering. Mistakes can be amended. Forgiveness can be found. Relationships can come knocking on your door. Dignity can be restored. Positive purpose can grace your path once more. Peace can be established in your heart.

If you don't believe yet that your life can get better, I invite you to piggy-back on my hope for you. In the meantime, go ahead and contact us (phone 866-YOU-VENT, 866-968-8368, or email at you-vent@desertwaters.com¹) or the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (800-273-TALK, 800-273-8255). If you know you're in dire danger, at risk of hurting yourself, please call 911 for help or ask a friend to drive you to your nearest hospital's Emergency Room. Your life is absolutely worth saving!

Caterina

¹Our website has instructions for getting an anonymous email address. For extra reassurance that your phone number will be blocked on all Caller ID systems, dial *67 (star 67) prior to the number for the Ventline—*67-1-866-968-8368 or our office—*67-1-719-784-4727.

WHEN YOU FEAR SOMEONE MAY TAKE THEIR OWN LIFE

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- Do not attempt to argue anyone out of suicide. Rather, let the person know you care and understand, that he or she is not alone, that suicidal feelings are temporary, that depression can be treated and that problems can be solved. Avoid the temptation to say, "You have so much to live for," or "Your suicide will hurt your family."

Seek Professional Help

- Be actively involved in encouraging the person to

see a physician or mental health professional immediately. Individuals contemplating suicide often don't believe they can be helped, so you may have to do more. For example, a suicidal college student resisted seeing a psychiatrist until his roommate offered to accompany him on the visit. A 17-year-old accompanied her younger sister to a psychiatrist because her parents refused to become involved.

- You can make a difference by helping the person in need of help find a knowledgeable mental health profes-

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Desert Waters

Correctional Outreach



*a non-profit organization
for the well-being of correctional
staff and their families*

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BLOGS

<http://desertwaters.blogspot.com>
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**We wish you a safe
and love-filled 2007!**

The Corrections Ventline™
1-866-YOU-VENT
(866.968.8368)
youvent@desertwaters.com

WHEN YOU FEAR SOMEONE MAY TAKE THEIR OWN LIFE

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sional or reputable treatment facility.

In an Acute Crisis

- In an acute crisis, take your friend or loved one to an emergency room or walk-in clinic at a psychiatric hospital.
- Do not leave them alone until help is available.
- Remove from the vicinity any firearms, drugs or sharp objects that could be used in a suicide attempt.
- Hospitalization may be indicated and may be necessary at least until the crisis abates.
- If a psychiatric facility is unavailable, go to your near-

est hospital or clinic.

- If the above options are unavailable, call your local emergency number or the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK.

Follow-up on Treatment

- Suicidal patients are often hesitant to seek help and may run away or avoid it after an initial contact unless there is support for their continuing.
- If medication is prescribed, take an active role to make sure they are taking the medication and be sure to notify the physician about any unexpected side effects. Often, alternative medications can be prescribed.