

## **MALE SUICIDE - 22 September 07**

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According to statistics, Australian men are four times more likely to commit suicide than women.

While a fact like that may give us all a jolt, it's important to realise that suicide rarely happens as a result of one major event – it usually has a number of causes. In many male suicides there is underlying mental illness (often undiagnosed) and alcohol or drug use.

Many men suffer from depression and don't realise how bad it is until an external stressor like losing a job or a relationship breakdown occurs. This can lead to a loss of identity, self worth and sense of meaning in life. Alcohol abuse is a huge problem for men in Australia, where it is commonplace to drink to excess. Over time, alcohol is a big risk factor as it can lead to both poor health and mood swings and an inability to cope with stressors. If someone is in this situation, and especially if they are affected by alcohol or drugs, suicide can be an impulsive decision.

For men whom job loss equals loss of identity, this is a major crisis in their lives. When this happens, men can find it harder to discover meaning in life, as they see their value measured by what they do, rather than who they are.

Men are more likely than women to be socially isolated, and this can contribute greatly to suicide risk. The biggest problem for men in an at-risk group is that they are less likely to seek help. Typically, men don't visit their GP very often. It is important for men take responsibility for their own well being and health and to seek help when they are struggling. Seeking help is a normal part of healthy living, so it's important not to let things build up and bottle them up simply because they feel that's part of being a bloke. And remember that good mental health is like fitness – you have to work on it.

For a family coping with the aftermath of a suicide, the grief can be overwhelming and they can feel very isolated and struggle with issues of guilt. Many people think, 'was there something I could have done to prevent this?' it's vital for the family to talk about it, either with counsellors or support groups.

What are the warning signs that a male in your family might be a suicide risk? Take the time to observe how the blokes in your family are coping. If they appear depressed or if exhibit a lot of self-destructive behaviour, get them to visit a mental health practitioner or your GP and seek some help before it's too late.

### **SURVIVAL TIPS**

- Male suicide usually has a number of underlying causes
- Look for risk factors such as self-destructive behaviour and depression and seek professional help immediately
- Seek advice from Suicide Helpline on 1300 651 251
- For support after a suicide call Compassionate Friends on 1800 641 091