

## Video Guide

### *But Jack Was A Good Driver*

14 minutes, color

#### A. Introduction to the film

Ed and Bob, two high school students, are discussing their friend Jack, who has just died in a one car accident. Was it an accident? What clues do the boys discover which suggests that Jack was a suicide?

Suicide occurs when a person intentionally kill himself/herself. Two major aspects of suicide are outcome and intention. It is clear if a persons dies or does not die; that is the outcome. Pinning down intentions is not easy.

#### B. Why?

There is no simple list of reasons why people commit suicide. Generally, a combination of factors occurs prior to suicide. Coleman (1976, pp. 606-608) describes four broad categories of factors.

1. Interpersonal crises. Separations, divorce, death, or marital conflict can result in severe stress and suicide.
2. Failure and lowered self-worth. Failure in some important undertaking and the feelings of lowered self-worth can result in severe stress and suicide.
3. Inner conflicts. Stress here results from conflicts with the person's own mind in which no options but death seem possible.
4. Loss of meaning and hope. When a person feels a loss of meaning and hope, life may appear futile and so he/she gives up by taking his/her own life. Loss of meaning and hope can occur in persons with long term, serious illnesses and terminal illnesses.

These factors don't always predict suicide. However, persons experiencing several of these factors are more likely to try suicide than persons not experiencing these events.

#### C. Clues?

Potential suicides generally give clues to their intentions. The most important fact to be aware of is that persons who threaten suicide often do. About 80% of suicides have either directly threatened to commit suicide or have given indirect threats which include saying they would be better off dead, referring to methods of committing suicide, or making predictions about bad things happening to them. These messages are a cry for help and should be heeded. Other clues are sudden change in personality, increased alcohol drinking, increased taking of drugs, severe depression, loss of interest in activities and friends, a drop in academic performance, accident proneness, and/or the giving away of valued possessions. These are some of the clues to be aware of.

## D . Helping?

Why should we pay any attention to the clues to suicide? Won't a person who wants to commit suicide do it no matter what? There are different degrees of intent to kill oneself. Only about 3 % to 5 % of all suicide attempts are made by persons who definitely want to die. These suicides occur with little warning, are done so help can't be given, and use the surer methods of death, such as shooting and jumping from high places.

The Golden Gate bridge in San Francisco is the favorite jumping spot in this country. Less than 5 % of those who jump survive. Police patrol the bridge and have stopped many from jumping. Research on those who were stopped from jumping has found that only 10% later committed suicide. In summary, only a small percent of attempted suicides want to die. Many give clues so that help can be given.

About 67% of attempted suicides do not wish to die but are using their suicide attempt as another cry for help. Their suicide attempts involve minor wrists slashing or other attempts which would not produce death. Another 30% are undecided about death and select methods which are deadly but slow. The attempt is timed so that someone else might be available to offer help. If the person is late or the person attempting suicide miscalculates, death occurs. In over 95 % of all suicide attempts, the will to live is still strong enough to give out a cry for help.

## E. Preventing?

Living life is solving problems. At various times in all our lives there are problems which can't be solved by our normal methods. Such a difficult problem is called a crisis. Crisis intervention are those activities designed to help an individual solve his/her difficult problems. There are a variety of individuals and organizations in our society that attempt to help in a crisis. Suicide is a serious crisis and suicide prevention services have been established to be available 24 hours a day, are tied into other community agencies, and have expanded to deal with other life crisis.

The first suicide prevention center was found by Norman Farberow in Los Angeles. In a 1974 article he describes 5 steps a worker answering the telephone in a suicide prevention center is to follow.

- "(1) Establishes rapport and maintains contact with the caller: Efforts are begun as early as possible to combat feelings of helplessness and hopelessness. The caller needs to feel that he/she has come to the right place, that the person to whom he/she is talking to is experienced and can help him/her, and that there is hope for him/her.
- (2) Clarifies the caller's immediate need and less urgent problems: The patient, in his/her chaos and confusion, frequently is unable to concentrate on any one of his/her problems but tends to get lost in all of them. The worker is of most assistance in helping the person to appraise each problem and to assign priorities to them.

- (3) Evaluate suicide danger potential: A question of major concern at all times is: how close is the caller to acting out his/her self-destructive impulses? If the danger is not **immediate**, the interview can continue by telephone. If the danger is imminent or the caller has already initiated a suicide attempt, the primary responsibility of the worker is either to provide constructive ways of preventing the suicide act or to obtain medical care, such as immediate emergency hospitalization.
- (4) Evaluates resources available to the caller: The suicidal person's tendencies toward isolation and detachment need to be halted. His/her interpersonal, financial) and physical resources are explored and used where possible. These may include family or relatives, a significant other, friend, neighbor, employer, clergyman, professional, hospital, or other.
- (5) Sets up a treatment plan. A plan is worked out with the caller which tries to involve him/her in doing something for himself/herself. The program is action oriented and frequently involves manipulating his/her environment as well as providing general support. " (Suicide, 1974, p. 20 Psychology File)

F. You may be faced at some time with a friend who is thinking of suicide. **What can you do?**

1. Take seriously any comments about wanting to end life. Try to determine how serious the person is. Don't be afraid to ask if they had thoughts of killing themselves. Your asking is not going to put the idea in their mind.
2. Offer your understanding. A person considering suicide is often confused and overwhelmed with his/her crisis. Accept the person's ideas and feelings. Your understanding may give **him/her** hope.
3. Attempt to get the person to postpone his/her suicide. Suicide can continue to be a way to solve the crisis but once chosen all other options disappear.
4. Attempt to help the person solve his/her problem. Just listening may be sufficient encouragement for the person to continue trying to solve his/her problems. Often the person thinking of suicide has become so overwhelmed with his/her problems that he/she is not able to see alternative solutions. You may be able to help.
5. Attempt to get the person to professional help. One good place to start is the hot line at Grassroots which is a crisis intervention center.

6. Don't stop your effort too soon. Suicide often occurs when a person seems to get better after a severe depression. The improvement in mood is deceptive because the person had decided to die and the anticipation of relief from suffering improves his/her mood.

G. How much do you now understand about suicide? Think about the statements below after seeing the film.

Place a T in the blank space if you think the statement is true. Place an F in the blank in front of the sentence if you think it is false. Do this after seeing the film in class.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ Apparently almost everyone contemplates suicide at sometime or other in their life.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ Suicide rarely happens without warning.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ Suicidal persons are fully intent on dying.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ Most of those who try to kill themselves are suicidal for a limited period of time only.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ If someone talks about committing suicide there is no need to worry. Those who talk about it don't do it.
6. \_\_\_\_\_ Suicide is one of the top two or three causes of death of teenagers and young adults.
7. \_\_\_\_\_ More than 25,000 persons in the United States killed themselves last year.
8. \_\_\_\_\_ Ten times as many attempted suicide last year as committed suicide.

### **LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

1. Discuss and answer the above 8 questions.
2. Describe the clues for detecting a potential suicide and suggest ways you might help a person thinking of suicide.
3. Describe the four most important things you learned about suicide.
4. Do you know anyone who has attempted suicide? What happened?