

THE

“WHY NOT?”

WORKBOOK

**Breaking The Silence
On Teen Suicide**

JACKIE SIMMONS

The “Why Not?” Workbook: Breaking The Silence

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“‘The Talk’ we’re supposed to have with our teens used to be about sex, then . . . ‘The Talk’ we’re told to have with our teens was about drugs and alcohol. Now, “The Talk” we must have with our teens is about suicide.” – Jackie Simmons

Why Suicide Prevention starts with “Why Not”

Suicide prevention starts with “Why Not” because when it comes to your brain, asking “why” is not the fastest path to change.

Our brains do not respond well to questions that start with “why.”

Imagine you’re sitting in a café and you’ve just finished a yummy chocolate-drizzled croissant. You look up and see me walk in. You’re happy to see me because I’m a friend and I ask: “Why did you eat that?”

In that instant, what happens in your body? Do you tense up? Does your stomach kind of turn a little? Do you feel like you need to defend and justify?

Did you know that there's only one answer to a "Why did you do that?" question? There's only one answer because there's only one reason why we do anything. We do what we do because it seems like the best idea at the time. Just like that chocolate croissant, even if you're on diet, ordering it seemed like the best idea at the time . . .

So what's making suicide seem like the best idea at the time?
The answer lies inside our brains.

Imagine you're in pain. You have a headache. What options do you have? You can take an aspirin and make it go away right? What if it's a migraine? What if it's a migraine that lasts for weeks no matter what you do. No matter what your doctor tries, this incredible pain just doesn't go away . . .

The human brain is always looking for solutions and considering worst-case scenarios . . . So you'll start to wonder "What if this pain never goes away?" You may have the passing thought: "I can't live like this."

This is why Sigmund Freud said that suicidal thoughts are normal. We all have them. Suicide is simply one idea for ending pain.

So, what does it take to make suicide become the "best idea at the time?"

It starts with judging the suicidal thought as "bad." Have you ever done something "bad" and then found yourself thinking about it a lot? That's what can happen with a suicidal thought.

Some folks simply dismiss it and move on to consider other ideas. Some folks get scared. When we're scared of a thought, we don't share it and we can get caught up in a loop, thinking about it.

Let's say you have a passing suicidal thought. You're uncomfortable sharing it, so you don't. The thought comes back and you start to worry that the suicidal thought might be a problem. You become afraid because you're worried that the thought might be a problem.

Emotion adds intensity to the thought. Now you're thinking suicidal thoughts, not feeling safe to share your thoughts, the fear compounds the worry, and the thoughts multiply becoming a "negative echo chamber" in your brain.

Every time you try not to think the thought you're actually thinking about suicide more. Trying not to think about suicide is like doubling down on it. And your subconscious mind notices when you're doubling down on a thought.

Your subconscious mind is elegantly designed to get you what is important to you. a.k.a.: what you constantly think about. Your subconscious mind is designed to create plans, seek out, and even create opportunities to get you what you're constantly thinking about. And if what you're thinking about is suicide, and an opportunity appears, you might be in action before you're even consciously aware that you're moving.

It's worse for teens because their impulsivity has yet to be curbed by the perspective of time. But we can fall victim to our own subconscious thoughts.

To be clear: it's not the thoughts themselves that are dangerous, it's the not talking about the thoughts that's dangerous. What we've learned is that not talking about suicidal thoughts amplifies underlying fear and worry. The CDC states that the unwillingness to talk about suicidal thoughts is, in and of itself, a risk factor for suicide. That's why we must break the silence on suicide.

Where silence has gotten us

Every day in the US, more than 3,000 teenagers believe that taking their own lives is the best idea. That's right, over 3,000 teens are attempting to take their own lives every day, just in the US, just teens, and just attempts. This number does not include the ones who died, just those who tried that we know about.

3,000+ a day does not include the teens who planned, just those who made an attempt. This number does not include teens who cut, burn, or otherwise inflict harm on themselves with non-lethal intent. 3,000+ a day is the number of teens who try to die every day because dying seems like the best idea at the time. And no one's comfortable talking about it.

The tide of teen suicide is rising, the numbers are getting larger, and the silence is literally killing them.

It was December 2019, and in the middle of the Cowboy Christmas convention, a grandmother of a lady hugged me with tears in her eyes.

I had wandered into her booth as she was arranging the wares in anticipation of the crowds of cowboys and cowgirls in town for the big rodeo.

The booth smelled of leather and as I admired the bags made from cowboy boots, we chatted. I had just told her about the launch of the Teen Suicide Prevention Society when she hugged me.

After the hug, the stories. She was a retired pediatric critical care nurse. With shoppers weaving around us, she shared about the parents who insisted that someone else shot their child, the families ripped apart by the fear of mental illness, the shame that left her to be the one holding the hand of a child who was dying because living had become too painful to bear.

The years of stories had left the shadow of loss in her eyes. I cried as she thanked me and begged me not to stop. In my hand as I walked away, a talisman. She gifted me with a key fob that I carry every day to remind me of my promise to her, to my middle daughter, and to you.

The promise: I will not stop beating the drum of “One Is Too Many” until teen suicide is a thing of the past.

It’s not a role I ever expected to play . . .

June 1995, the start of summer vacation, my daughters were in high school and middle school. We were a stable, middle-class, American family. Life was as predictable as you can imagine with three teenagers.

The girls were getting ready for their summer visit with their dad and his family, one state away. That meant shopping!

My daughter, Stephanie, was 14. She was in-between her sisters, in-between schools, and in-between clothing sizes. The shopping became an adventure. Outfit after outfit, store after store, nothing fit her. At the end of the day, we came home with nothing . . . except an attitude.

Stephanie headed straight upstairs to the bathroom and I collapsed on the sofa, grateful to be off my feet. Peace & Quiet

Then: “Mom, I think I need help . . .” My eyes were drawn to Stephanie’s left arm. Blood was dripping down her fingers onto the wood floor.

The emotional part of my brain started screaming in terror at the sight of my bleeding, obviously suicidal, child. The rational part of my brain started flipping through the files in my head, looking for the date of her last tetanus shot.

I wrapped her in my arms and assessed the wounds. They were not life-threatening.

Have you ever felt panicky and calm at the same time?

We applied bandages and made a plan to visit the teen mental health facility the next day.

Our tears finally stopped. Our mutual “I’m sorrys” were shared. Stephanie fell asleep.

I couldn’t risk being away from her, so we slept in the living room. Between us was a hand-written note. Her promise not to harm herself again while I slept.

Yeah, right, like I was going to close my eyes that night.

All night, I stared into the darkness and listened to her breathe, grateful she was still alive.

My thoughts whirled: “What just happened?” “How did this happen?” “Who’s to blame?” It had to be somebody’s fault, right???

What followed . . . years of counseling, therapy, medications, hospitalizations, interventions, and 13, yes – 13 more attempts.

Stephanie getting professional help made it easy for me to sell myself on the idea that we didn’t need to talk about it.

I didn't want to talk about it. Would you want to know what could cause your child so much mental and emotional pain that they thought dying was better than living?

I didn’t want to know, so I didn’t ask. I was scared of putting the thought back into her head, so I stayed silent. A silence that lasted for 23 years.

It’s been only a few months since Stephanie first shared her story publicly and we decided, along with her sisters, to launch the non-profit Teen Suicide Prevention Society. Every day I

discover just how much the silence stole from us: the conversations, the closeness, the connections that couldn't happen because we didn't know how to break the silence.

What we've learned

Since the non-profit launched on April 1, 2020, we've learned that breaking the silence is the key to effective suicide prevention.

According to the CDC, the biggest indicator that a teen is at risk of suicide is if they have attempted suicide before. These are also the most likely to be getting professional help, so they're good, right? Maybe not, a lot depends on if the friends and family keep or break the silence.

The second biggest indicator that a teen will attempt suicide is if they know someone who's tried or died. Thanks to media, we all know someone who's died by suicide. - a gifted chef, a talented singer, a brilliant comedian And if you ask your teen, you might be surprised to learn how many of their classmates have tried or died.

The third biggest indicator that a teen will attempt suicide is if they are being treated for depression. Note: sometimes a suicide attempt is the first symptom of teen depression.

After my daughter's attempt I went on a journey to understand. How can living become so painful, that dying seems like a better choice? Especially when teens have only begun to live?

On my journey to understand why teenagers take their own lives, I took a detour into the land of "Why Not."

Why is there not a cure for depression? Why is there not a program that really works to prevent suicide re-attempts? Why is there not a national conversation about this? Why is there not a safe place to talk about it all?

In the land of "Why Not," I discovered:

- The brain is naturally inclined to see the negative first.
- The natural negative bias of the brain is designed for survival.
- The worst-case scenario mechanism of the brain often includes suicide as an option.
- According to Sigmund Freud, suicidal thoughts are NORMAL.
- Thoughts of suicide actually unlock our problem-solving capabilities.

- The fear of suicidal thoughts can keep us stuck thinking about it.
- The worry about suicidal thoughts can keep us stuck to the point where not thinking about suicide feels impossible.
- The more we try not to think about suicide, the more we think about it. The subconscious mind notices when we're doubling down on a thought.
- The subconscious mind is elegantly designed to seek out and even create opportunities to get us what we "want." a.k.a.: What we constantly think about . . .

This subconscious mechanism is the law of attraction in action and it's the reason we absolutely **MUST** break the silence on suicide. All it takes is for an opportunity to cross with a subconscious plan and our teens are in action before they even know what they're doing.

So why "Why Not?"

The majority of suicide prevention programs are focused on why you "should" want to live . . . and the programs rarely kick in until after an attempt.

This workbook is for the rest of us. It's a first step, pure-prevention way to stem the tide of the teen suicide epidemic.

As you dive into in this workbook you'll see how asking "Why Not" rewires the brain and breaks the cycle of suicidal thoughts before they lead to actions. Doing this easy, four-step workout, you'll begin to easily break the silence for yourself and others.

Keep going, I'm delighted that you're here . . .

The four steps of "Why Not"

Step One: Save this number in your phone: 1-800-273-8255. If you're not in the US, find your local suicide prevention hotline, write it down and save it in your phone as "Suicide Prevention" or "Help."

Step Two: You'll need a timer, a pad of paper and something to write with. Typing is not as effective, printing is fine. Set your timer for five minutes. Write the Question below and then start the timer and answer the question. Repeat this step as many times as you can in five minutes. Ready? Set your timer and go! "Why not die today?" "Why not die today?" "Why not

die today?” “Why not die today?” “Why not die today?” “Why not die today?” “Why not die today?”

Don't be surprised if your first answers are negative, nasty, snarky, sarcastic, or even scary. They may also be rainbows and puppy dog tails. No answer is wrong, all answers work to break the cycle so keep writing.

Step Three: Read your list of questions and answers out loud. Get a blank calendar page or a wall calendar and for 30 days, every morning upon rising, and every evening before laying down, revisit your list of questions and answers from Step Two. Mark the calendar with a diagonal line every morning that you revisit your list of questions and answers. Mark the calendar with a diagonal line in the opposite direction for every evening that you revisit your list of questions and answers.

Build a chain of Why Not X-marks. This chain is like coating yourself with Emotional Teflon. As you discover more “Why Nots,” add them to your list. Each time you add to your list, your subconscious mind becomes more and more invested in helping you find even more “Why Nots.”

Quickly, you'll end up with an amazing list of what's so good about your life.

The mind is a funny thing. If you tried to start with a list of “what's so good about your life,” the brain shift and change in thinking takes much longer. That's why we start with your “Why Nots!”

Step Four: Now, share your “Why Not” list of answers with your friends and family. Invite them to write their own list of answers. Take turns being the one to ask the question seven times.

If there's more than two of you, experiment with each person having a turn being the one who asks the questions. If there's an even number, pair up and set timers and see how much fun a “Why Not Gathering” can be. In fact, you can have a “Why Not Gathering” and turn it into a party celebrating all of your collective “Why Nots.”

Important Note: If your list, or someone else's list is completely empty, immediately call a suicide hotline. Offer to hold their hand as they call or ask someone to hold yours.*

*Calls can be made anonymously.

“Why Not” Example

Expectations and Outcomes from doing the “Why Not” Workbook.

Mark and I partnered up for a “Why Not” Workbook and the session went like this: (note: Mark is my life partner and he has no clue how what I do works, but he’s willing to humor me and play along.) Let’s get started:

“Why not die by suicide today?”

“It’ll take too much effort.”

“Why not die by suicide today?”

“It’ll make a bloody mess – oh that’s for others.”

“Why not die by suicide today?”

“It’ll create too much paperwork – oh that’s for others, too.”

“Why not die by suicide today?”

“I will miss seeing people smile.”

“Why not die by suicide today?”

“I might miss meeting an interesting person.”

“Why not die by suicide today?”

“I might miss the chance to drive a different car.”

“Why not die by suicide today?”

“I would miss swimming.”

As Mark moved down the list of questions, his answers became more and more about what he enjoys in his life and less about the negative. I couldn’t help but smile as he smiled listening to his own answers.

There’s a lot of power in sharing this exercise so feel free to ask more than one friend to help you practice. The more you practice with your friends and loved ones, the more emotionally resilient your whole tribe will become.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Should I ask my exercise partner if they know someone who’s attempted suicide?

A: There's no need to ask them anything other than "Will you help me with my 'Why Not' Workbook?" The "Why Not" Workbook is a pattern interrupt that retrains the brain to see the positive. Their emotional state when you start doesn't matter. There's really no need to ask anything other than "Will you help me with my 'Why Not' Workbook?"

Q: What if I think they're lying/making-up answers?

A: Don't worry. They can't do it wrong. Even made-up answers interrupt the cycle of habitual thought.

Q: Regarding the Steps of the "Why Not" Workout: Are they meant as an exercise for a parent or a teen? Or both working together?

A: The answer is Yes, Yes, and Yes. The Steps are meant to be used by yourself, with a teen, and/or shared with your friends and family.

Q: Can the "Why Not" exercise be done alone?

A: Absolutely. This is a great way to get to know yourself and what's really important to you.

Q: Can the "Why Not" exercise be done in a group?

A: Absolutely. This is a great way to get to know each other and to share what's really important to you.

Q: Do I really need to read my answers out loud?

A: Yes. If your goal is to make yourself "suicide-proof" and help others become so, then read your question and answers out loud. When it comes to reaching your subconscious mind, your own voice is the most powerful.

Q: Should I ask my exercise partner if they're sad?

A: There's no need to ask them anything other than "Will you help me with my 'Why Not' Workbook?" The "Why Not" Workbook is a pattern interrupt that retrains the brain to see the positive. Their emotional state when you start doesn't matter. There's really no need to ask anything other than "Will you help me with my 'Why Not' Workbook?"

Q: Can the "Why Not" exercise be repeated?

A: Certainly! In fact, repeating the exercise reinforces the change.

Q: What if my answers remain negative?

A: Simply having a list of "Why Nots" will interrupt any suicidal thought patterns naturally. The one thing to remember is that you cannot do this exercise wrong.

Q: How can I force my mind to think about anything else other than my depression and suicidal thoughts?

A: The mind will answer any question it is asked. That's what it's designed to do. Most of the time we forget to give the mind direction and are caught up in the natural negative bias. Writing and answering the "Why Not" Question seven times will interrupt the old cycle of negative thinking. Even a brief interruption will give the brain more access to your innate creative problem-solving abilities.

Conclusion:

There are more great things in store for you over at the website. To learn more about the mission and check out the resources visit www.TeenSuicidePreventionSociety.com

A thought to ponder: we're actively seeking teachers, preachers, healers, and parents willing to build their own emotional intelligence and resilience and then take this guide and our other tools into groups and schools.

If you want to know more, please take the four-hour course on building emotional intelligence and resilience. At the end of the course you'll be coated with layers of emotional teflon and you'll be certified to lead "The Guides that Saves Lives."

There's no obligation to lead a group or make a presentation. What we've found is that taking the class improves your ability to communicate in an emotionally intelligent way and that improves all of your relationships.

Details are available on the "Courses" tab on the website and 100% of the proceeds are used to fulfill the mission to make teen suicide a thing of the past.

Thank you again for being you, thank you for caring enough to read this guide, and most of all thank you for staying.

We believe:

Heaven doesn't need another angel. Heaven knows we need you here.