

Why People Die By Suicide – A Summary

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This is a summary of both the book and article entitled « Why People Die By Suicide » by Thomas E. Joiner. According to an exhaustive research including a thorough review of literature on suicide over several decades, the author has elaborated three main concepts or constructs which must be present in order for people to take their own life.*

The Three [+ 1] Main Constructs	
1. Failed belongingness:	<i>“I don’t belong.”, “I am hopelessly alienated.”</i>
2. Perceived burdensomeness (to oneself and to others):	<i>“My death will be worth more than my life to others.”, “I don’t contribute to society.”</i>
3. Learned fearlessness about physical threat – acquired fearlessness of pain/injury/death:	<i>“I am desensitized to physical pain, injuries and death.”, “Nothing scares me anymore.”</i>
+ [Entrapment – feeling there is no option and no way to escape from the painful situation:]	<i>“I am feeling trapped and hopeless and need to get out of this perpetual hell.”</i>
Direction for Therapy	
1. Encourage increased connection to others;	
2. Improve the sense of meaningful contribution to others – family, close ones, peers, society;	
3. Eliminate or modify certain behaviours – hard bouts of exercise; cutting; playing violent video games; free-fall climbing; car racing; etc.	
4. Develop and entertain ongoing self-compassion, being kind to oneself, being a nurturing and supportive figure to oneself.	
5. Have a “hope box,” which is literally a box (e.g., a shoe box) in which the person collects mementos, objects, photos, letters, and the like, all of which, at times of crisis, remind the person of reasons for living and for hope. <i>Note:</i> The box can also be virtual, i.e. on a cell phone.	

* According to the author, we must avoid using the expression « to commit suicide », which implies a free will or a desire on the part of the person in distress, and which only further adds to the taboo of suicide and the alienation of people who end their life, and that of the family members and close ones. Instead, it is best to use expressions such as “to take one’s life”, “to end one’s life”, “to put an end to one’s life”, etc.