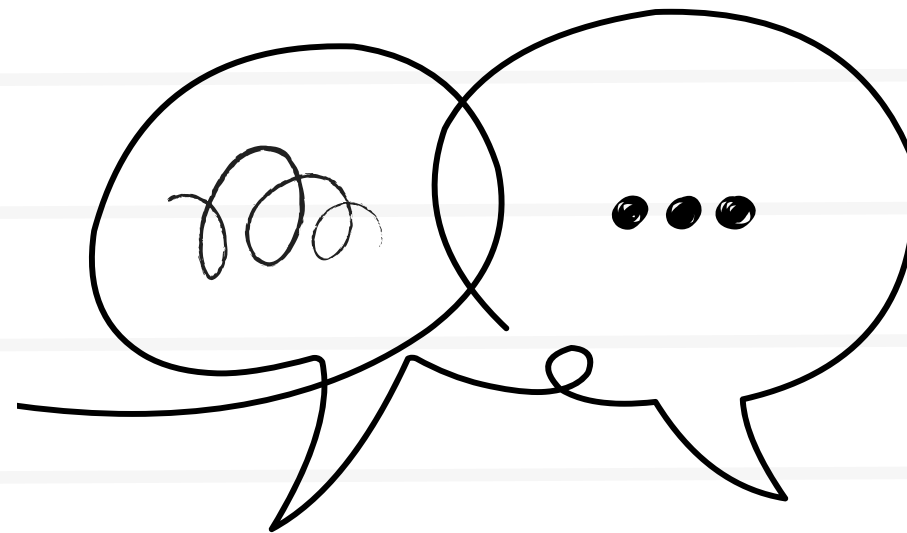




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WHAT TO SAY

when you don't know what to say...



SAMARITANS' GUIDE TO HANDLING TOUGH
CONVERSATIONS + DIFFICULT TOPICS

SEPTEMBER 18, 2024



- Part of the non-religious, international, suicide prevention network with over 400 centers in 48 countries
- Created the world's first suicide hotline
- Operates NYC's only 24-hour, anonymous & completely confidential crisis response hotline
- Hotline staffed entirely by devoted, community volunteers
- Samaritans' NYC also has an education program & suicide bereavement support program.

SUICIDE IS AN OUTCOME,
NOT A CAUSE.

THE BASICS OF BEFRIENDING

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PROCESS, NOT OUTCOME

We listen to ease the pain of daily life, not to change it. People are not problems to be solved.

BACKSEAT, NOT FRONTSEAT

Let the person lead the conversation. Follow their focus and stay present with what they're sharing.

LISTENING, NOT LABELING

Be mindful of your own biases to ensure your communication remains non-judgmental.

Remember, it's not about me.

WHY DOES SUICIDE SCARE US?





A SENSITIVITY EXERCISE

LEARNING FROM OUR OWN EXPERIENCE

When we want to support someone or have a tough conversation, it's essential to remind ourselves that while our personal experiences are important, they don't automatically apply to the other person's situation.

A helpful mindset to keep is: "It's not about me!" This serves as a reminder to keep our focus on the person we're supporting, rather than bringing our own stories or feelings into the conversation.

Every individual experiences challenges in their own way, and it's important not to assume that what helped us will automatically help them. While our personal experiences—no matter how intense—don't give us complete "understanding" of someone else's struggle, they do provide a foundation for empathy and how we can best support someone else.

Reflection Exercise: *Think back to a time in the past when you were in crisis—when you felt overwhelmed and as though things wouldn't get better. Staying within your comfort zone, reflect on how you felt during that time and consider the following questions.*

- How did your crisis affect you physically and emotionally?
- What thoughts or feelings made it difficult for you to function daily?
- What challenges did you face in opening up to others about your problems?
- When you reached out for help, what responses made you feel dismissed or discouraged?
- What did people say or do that made you regret seeking their support?



THE CRISIS EXPERIENCE

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WARNING SIGNS

TALK

- Talking, writing or posting about wanting to die
- Mentioning a plan or talking about ways they could die by suicide
- A preoccupation with death or suicide
- **Expressing they feel trapped, in unmanageable pain, or a burden to others**
- Statements like: 'I wish I was dead,' 'No one will miss me when I'm gone' or 'I wish I could just disappear.'

FEELINGS

- **Hopeless**, feeling they have no reason to live
- Experiencing deep despair and sadness, feeling trapped
- Increased anxiety
- Shame, humiliation
- Agitated, experiencing rage
- Extreme changes in mood
- Unbearable emotional or physical pain
- Loss of interest
- Relief, sudden improvement

BEHAVIOR

- Making preparations and/ or looking for ways to die by suicide
- Withdrawing or isolating
- Changes in eating and sleeping and patterns, hygiene/ appearance
- Displaying extreme mood swings
- Increased alcohol and/ or substance use
- A sudden worsening at school/ job/ home, etc.
- Increased impulsive reckless, and/or risk-taking behavior



RISK FACTORS

HEALTH

- Mental health conditions (particularly depression and other mood disorders)
- Serious physical or chronic condition, prolonged physical pain
- Terminal illness

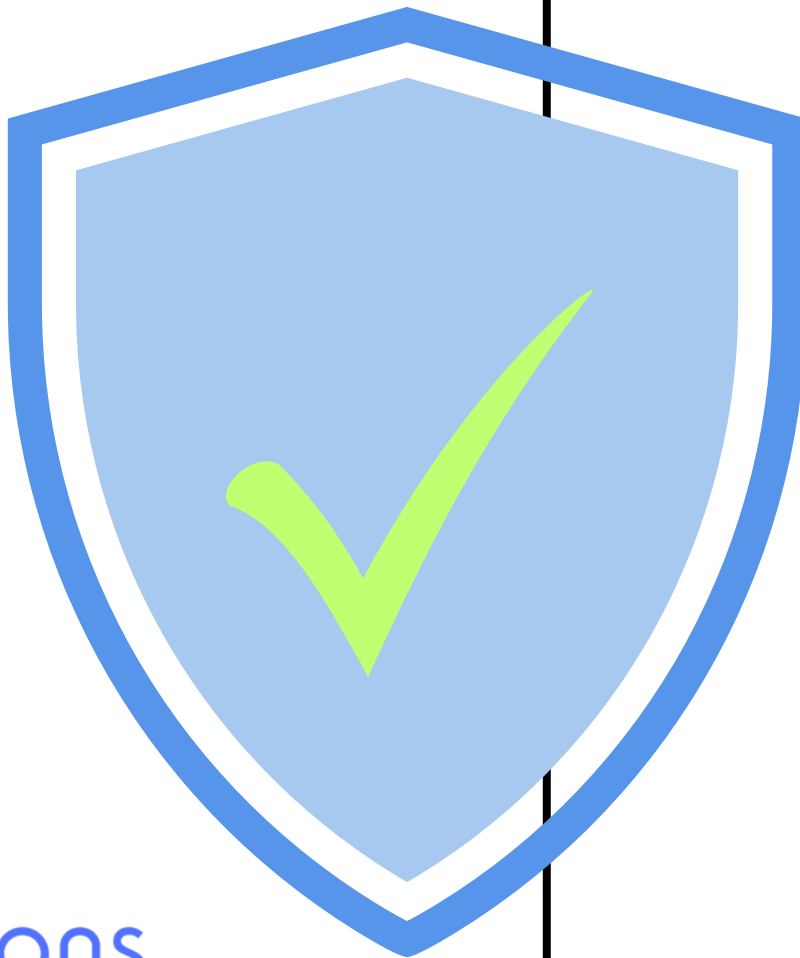
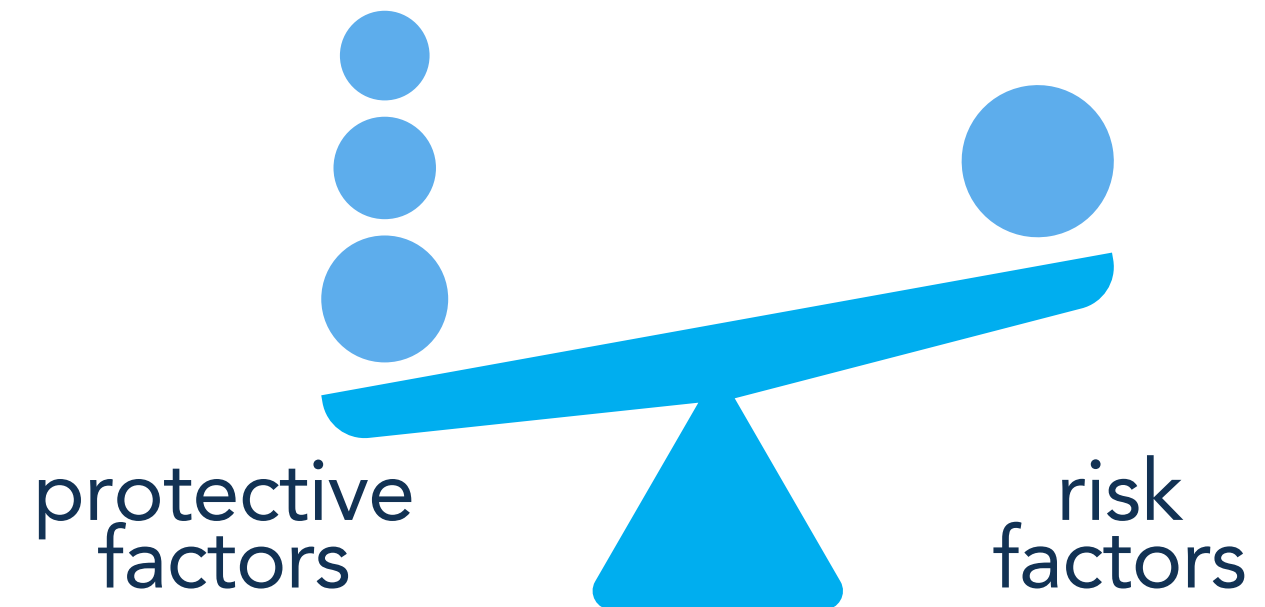
HISTORY

- Previous suicide attempt
- Alcohol and/ or substance abuse
- Family history of suicide
- Family history of mental health conditions
- Trauma
- Physical/ sexual abuse and/ or neglect
- Historical trauma
- Discrimination

ENVIRONMENT

- Social isolation
- Easy access to lethal means (especially guns)
- Loss of a significant relationship (death, divorce, break-up, etc.)
- High conflict or violent relationships
- Loss of job, income, unemployment, benefits
- Criminal/legal problems
- Prolonged bullying, harassment or victimization
- Limited access to health & mental health care
- Cultural/religious beliefs that encourage suicide
- Exposure to suicide (including (including a known person and through the media/ social media)
- Stigma

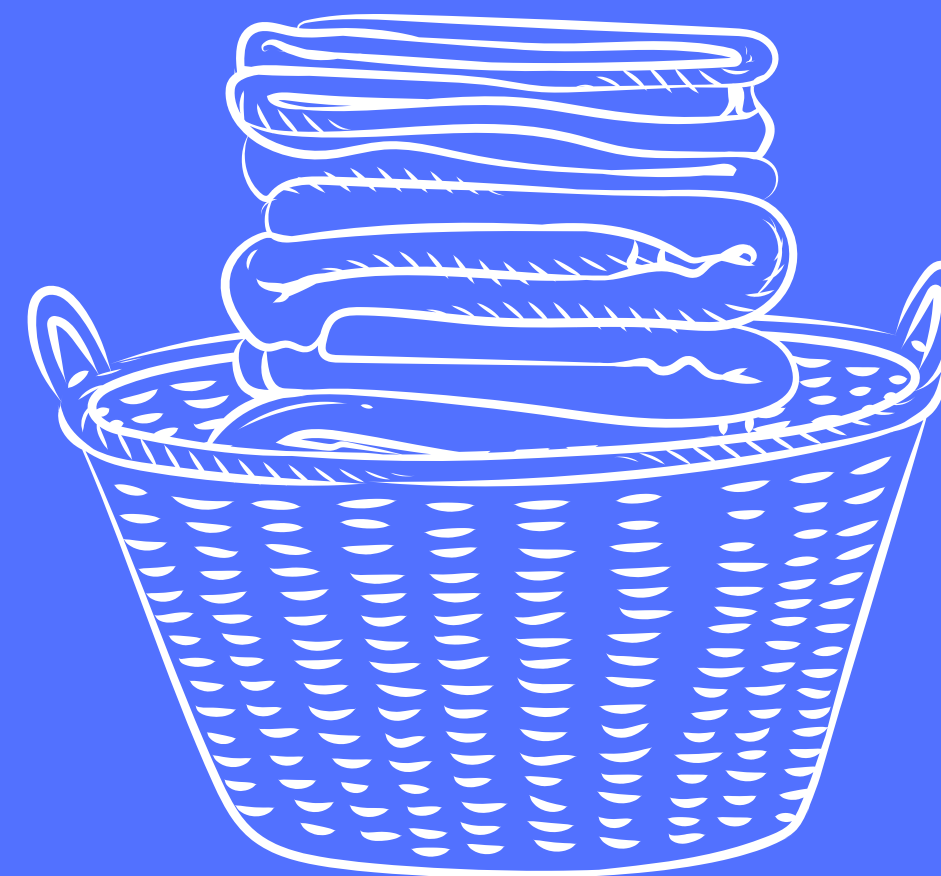
PROTECTIVE FACTORS



- ☐ Supportive and caring family and friends
- ☐ Reduced access to lethal means and enhanced lethal means safety
- ☐ Connection to a community, school, work or supportive organization
- ☐ Learned coping skills and behaviors
- ☐ Access to medical and mental health care
- ☐ Access to immediate and ongoing support
- ☐ Cultural and/or religious beliefs that discourage suicide

AT SAMARITANS WE SAY...

We listen to ease the pain of daily life,
not to change it.



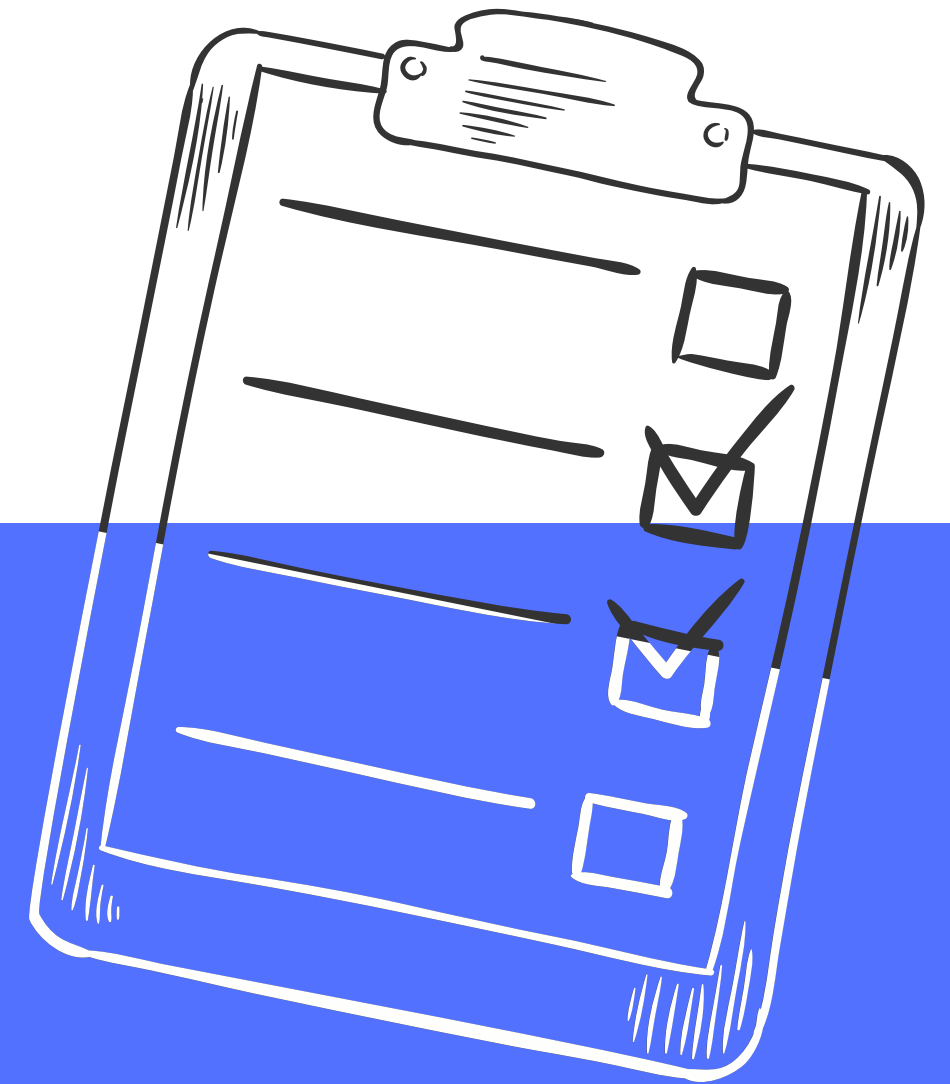
DO'S + DON'TS CHECKLIST

DO

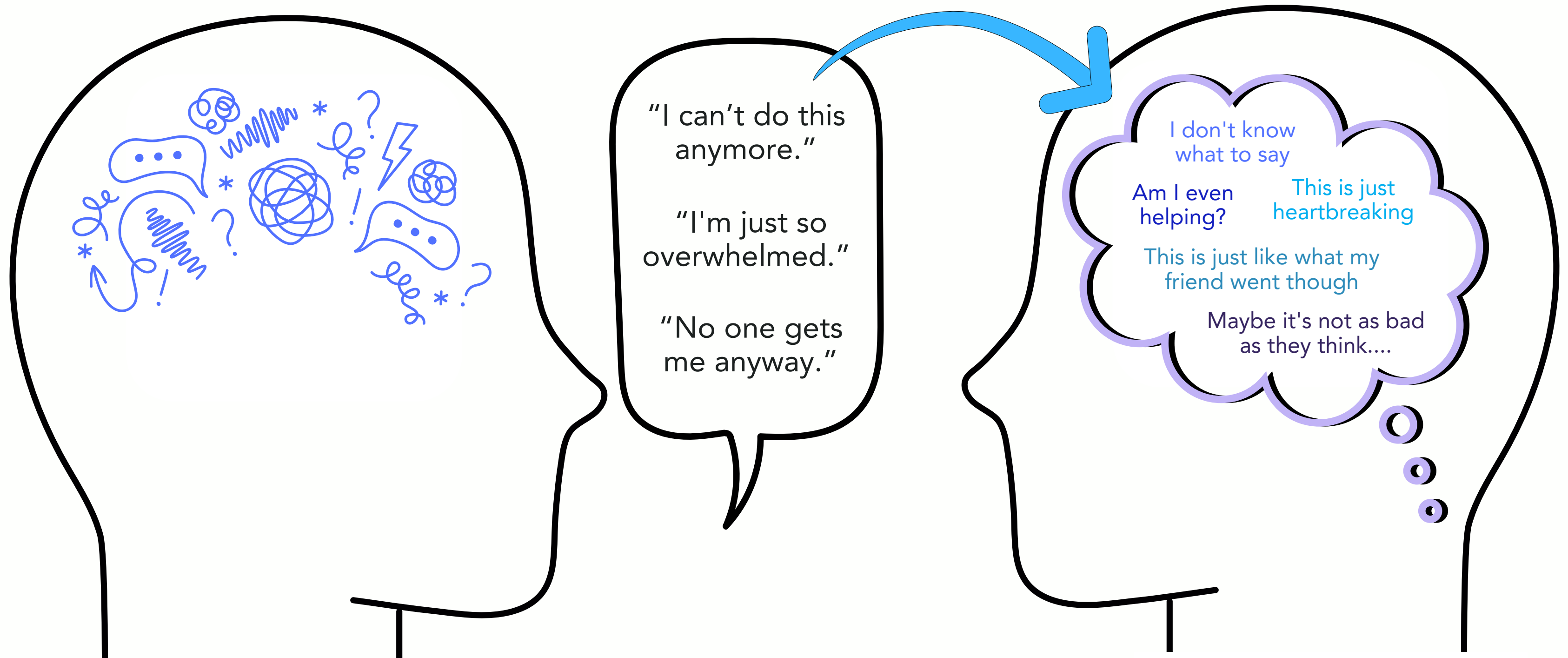
- Reflect Back
- Acknowledge Feelings
- Stay Present
- Be Aware of Your Judgments
- Encourage Openness

DON'T

- Give Advice
- Minimize Feelings
- Compare Experiences
- Rush to Positivity
- Focus on Solutions



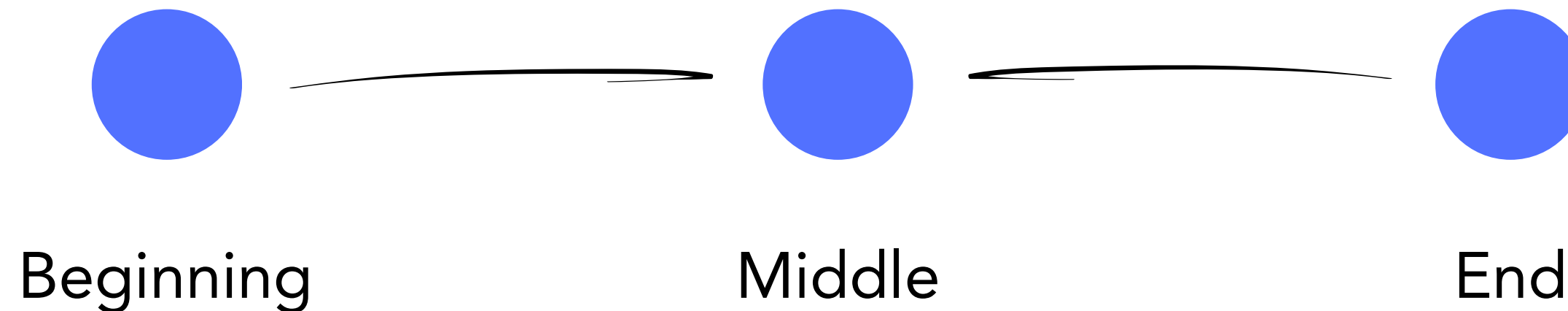
OBSTACLES TO COMMUNICATION



structuring a conversation

CREATE THE RIGHT ENVIRONMENT

- Comfortable
- Quiet
- Private
- Minimize distractions
- Turn off/ silence your phone



starting the conversation

BREAKING THE ICE

- I've noticed that you haven't seemed yourself lately, what's been going on?
- I've been feeling worried about you recently, and I want to check in. How are you doing?
- It seems like somethings going on and I want to let you know I'm here for you.
- I know you've been going through a lot. How are you holding up?
- I haven't heard from you in awhile, how are you?

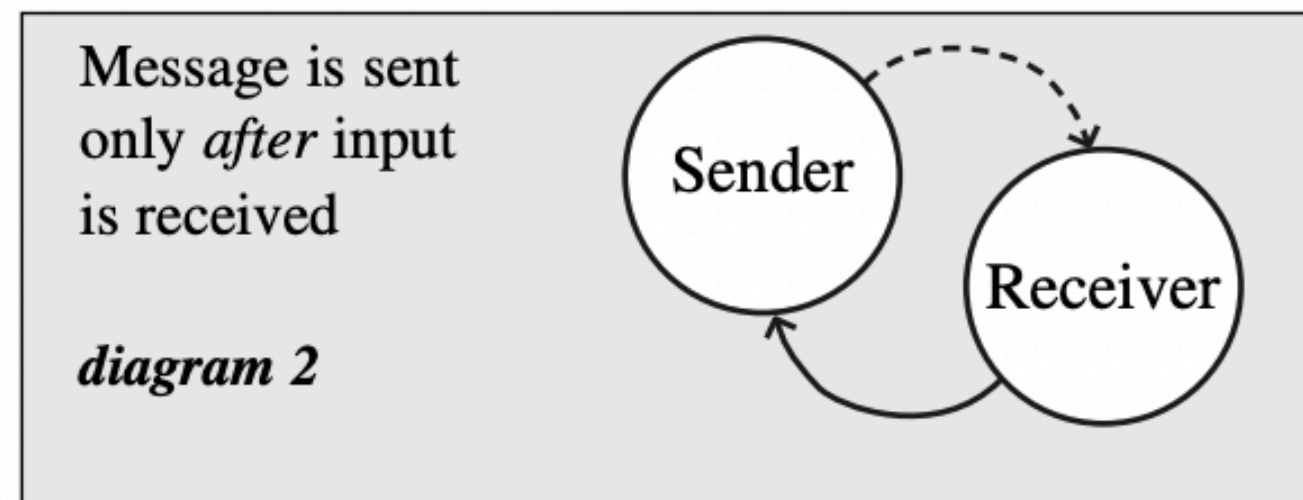
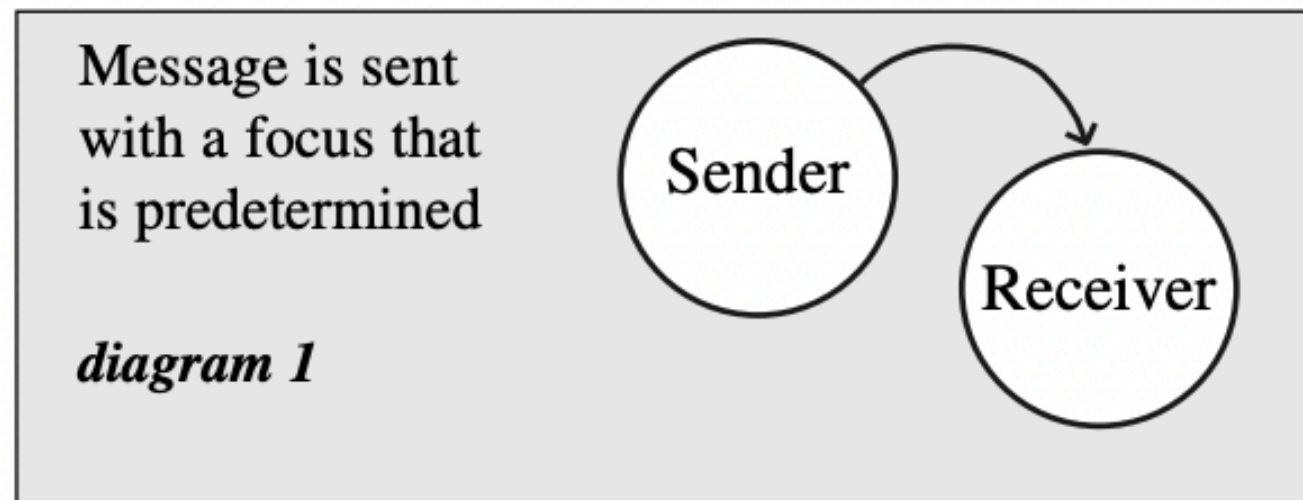


present situation

THE ISSUES AND CHALLENGES THEY ARE FACING **NOW**.

- Their support and living situation.
- Their physical and mental health
- Any economic, relationship, familial, environmental stressors.
- Impact of their previous experiences and history on their present feelings and circumstances.

ACTIVE LISTENING



keeping the focus on the person we are talking to

- It sounds like...
- You seem...
- This seems like...
- It must be...
- You mentioned...
- From what you're saying/ you've said...

AT SAMARITANS WE SAY...

Just because you don't understand someone,
that doesn't make them wrong.

Feeling stuck?

Validate!

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Validation Doesn't Mean Agreement

It is simply acknowledging their emotions without judgment, letting them know it's okay to feel what they are feeling.

Validation Encourages Openness

It helps lower their defenses, making them more open and willing to communicate.

Validation Strengthens Connections

It helps people feel heard and understood. It builds trust and helps them feel less alone.

5 Tips for Validating

- 1 Be Present, Not Perfect
- 2 Reflect Back What You Hear.
- 3 Say What You See.
- 4 Focus on Feelings, Not Fixing
- 5 Let Pain Be Pain.

ASKING ABOUT SUICIDE

ASSESSING SUICIDE IDEATION



QUESTIONS TO ASK

☐☐

Is the person **currently thinking** about suicide? Or have they experienced or expressed suicidal thoughts in the recent past?

☐☐

Does the person have a **plan** for how they would attempt suicide?

☐☐

Do they have the **means available** to carry out their plan?

☐☐

Has the person **set a specific time** to act on their plan?
If yes, when do they plan to act?

☐☐

Has the person **ever attempted suicide** in the past or do they have a family member that did so?



**THE MORE A PERSON RESPONDS
"YES", THE HIGHER THEIR RISK.**

WHEN YOU THINK IT'S SERIOUS, BUT THEY DON'T WANT TO TALK.

Trust Your Instincts

If in doubt, check it out. Don't wait for them to ask for help.

Consider their indications of risk.

Respect Their Boundaries, but Don't Promise Confidentiality

Suggest low-stakes ways to spend time together and reduce the pressure of the interaction:

- Side-by-side conversations
- Non-verbal support

Prioritize Safety: Stay with them if necessary

Try Again Later

If they aren't ready to talk now, don't give up.

Keep checking in.

WHERE TO GO FROM HERE...

URGENT ACTION

- ☐ life threatening situation
- ☐ imminent risk
- ☐ intervention

SUSTAINABLE SUPPORT

- ☐ struggling, but coping
- ☐ at-risk, but not imminent
- ☐ prevention

wrapping-up the conversation

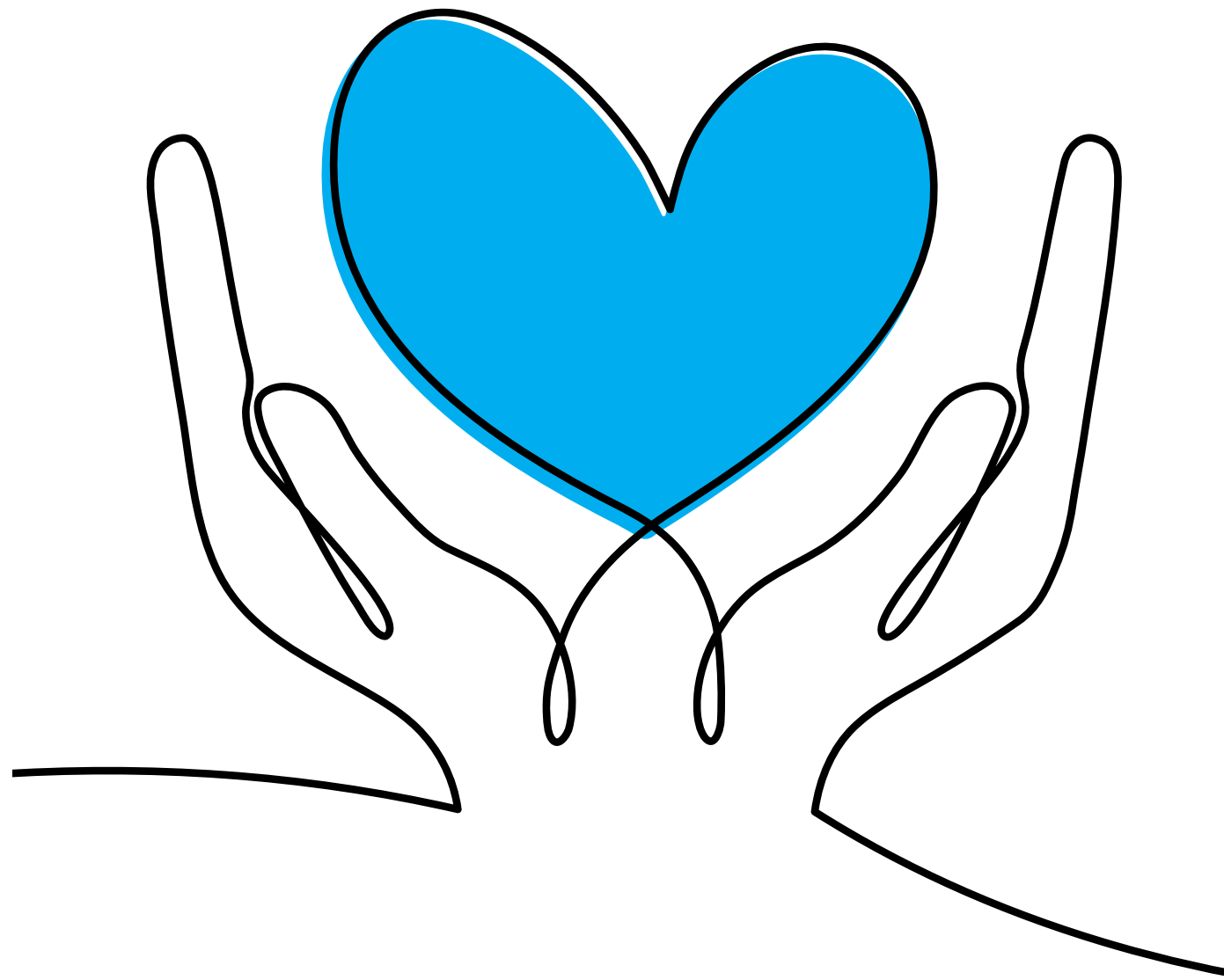
ALWAYS LEAVE THE DOOR OPEN

- It can be really hard to open up like you have. Thank you for trusting me.
- I'll be thinking of you and will reach back out soon.
- It's really good we were able to talk about what's been going on.
- I'm going to check in with you in a few days to see how you're doing.
- I'll make sure to reach out in a couple days, and I'm around if you want to talk sooner.

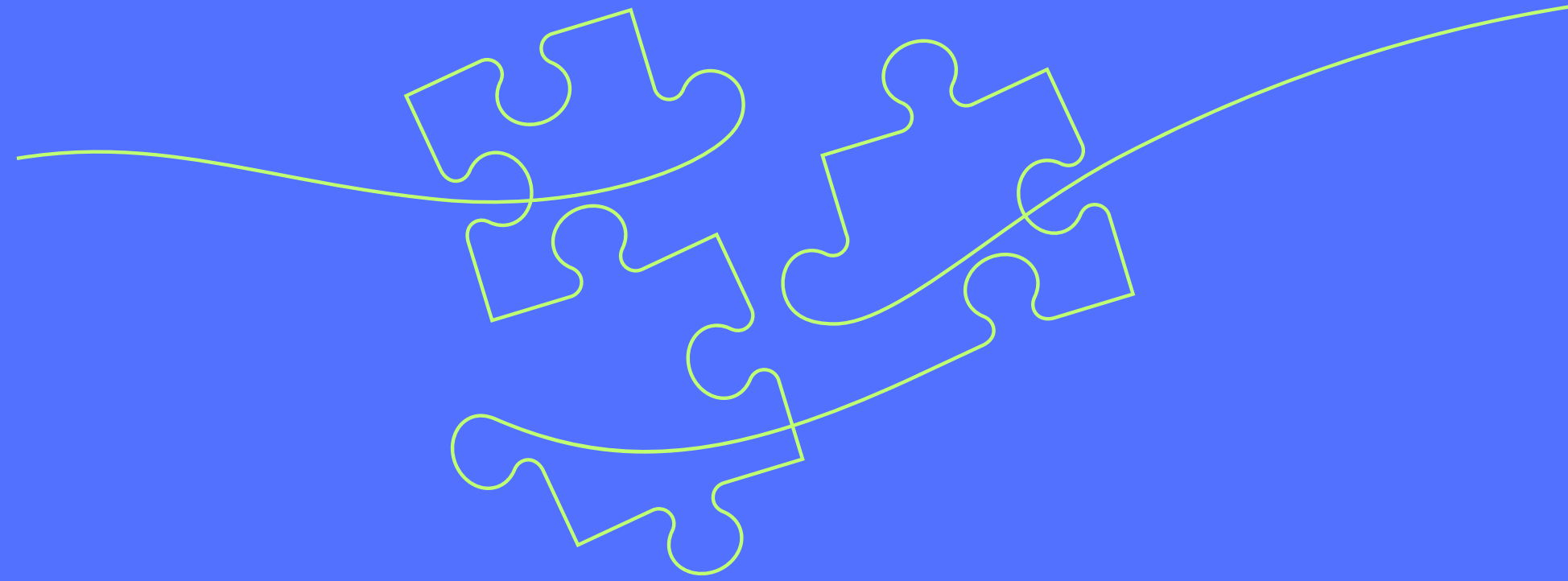


PROVIDE ONGOING SUPPORT

CHECK BACK-IN

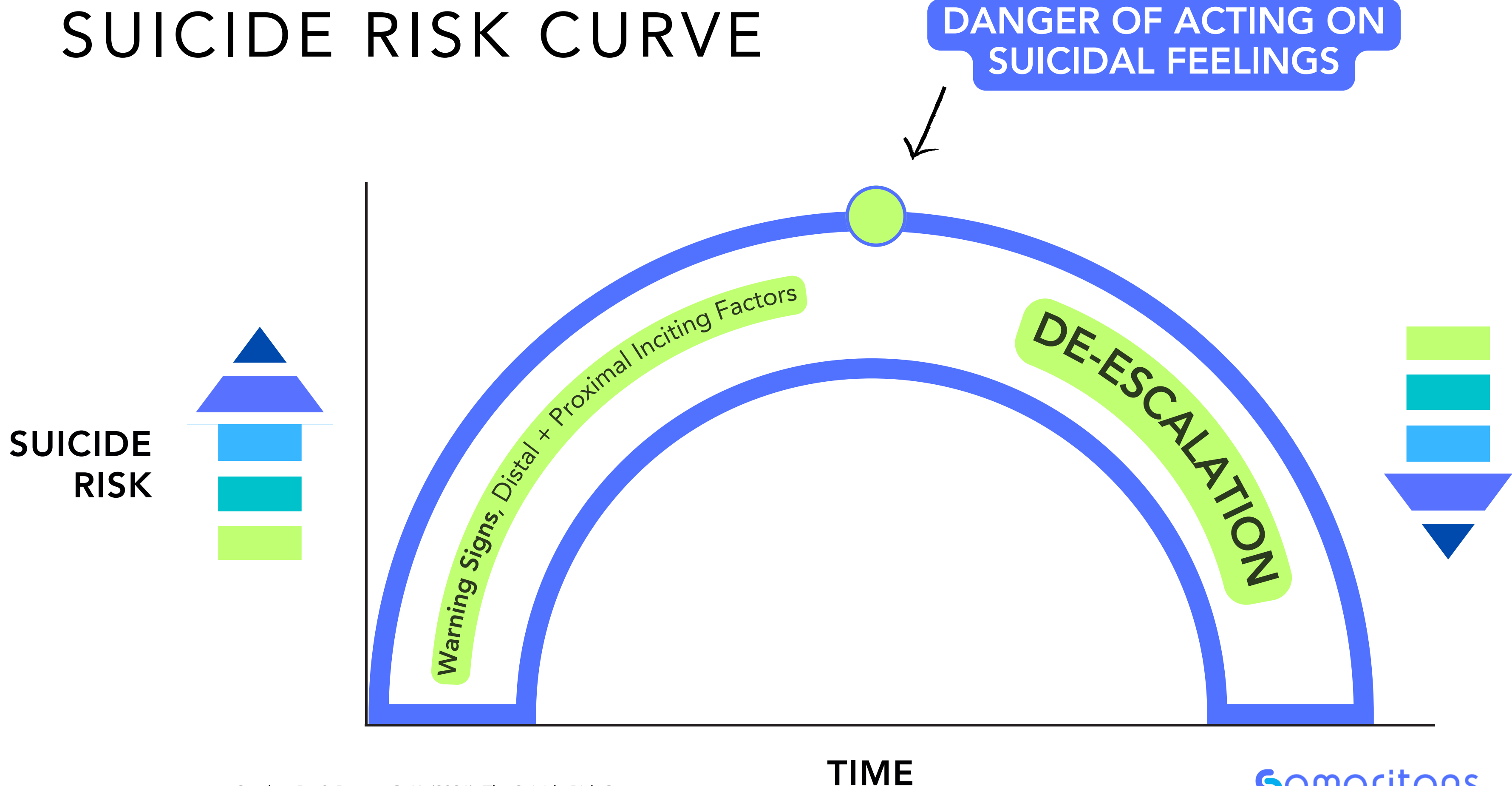


- Establish a routine or schedule for structure.
- Spend time in nature.
- Connect with caring family or friends.
- Join a book club, take a class, make time for hobbies.
- Prioritize your physical needs: getting enough sleep, taking time to eat properly, staying active
- Try a gratitude or mindfulness practice.
- Enjoy time with pets.
- Volunteer in your community
- Stay informed, but limit your exposure to crisis-related news.



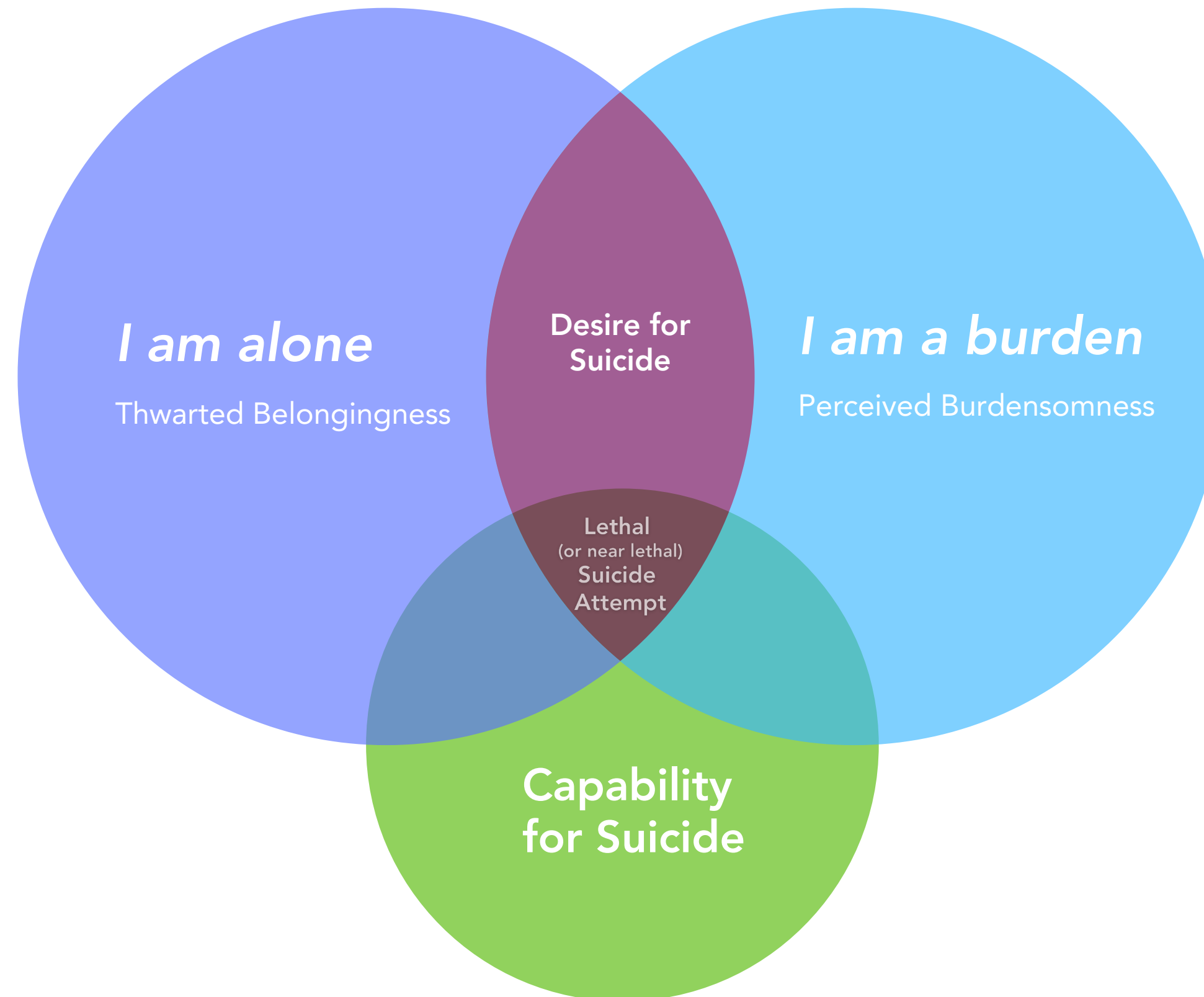
PUTTING THE PIECES TOGETHER

SUICIDE RISK CURVE



Stanley, B., & Brown, G. K. (2021). The Suicide Risk Curve

JOINER'S INTERPERSONAL THEORY OF SUICIDE



Hoping is coping.

Hope is one of the most powerful protective factors we have at our disposal.

CONNECTEDNESS

Strengthening relationships and fostering a sense of belonging to counter isolation.

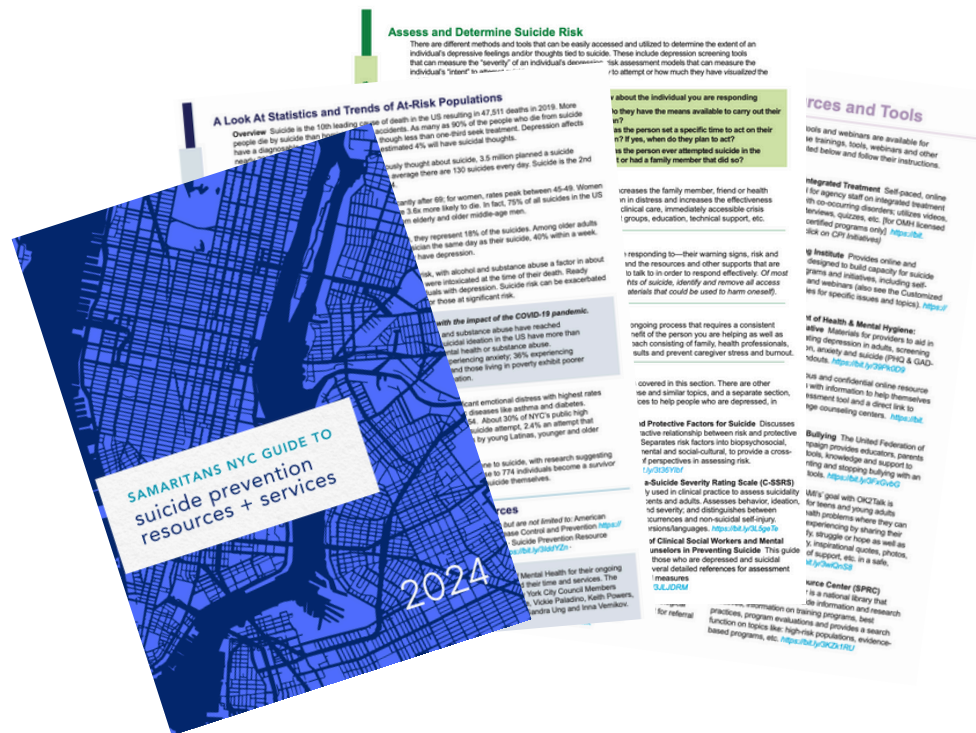
SELF-EFFICACY

Empowering individuals with choices and control, helping them take active steps in addressing challenges.

RESILIENCE

Building the belief that they can overcome challenges and continue striving for a meaningful future.

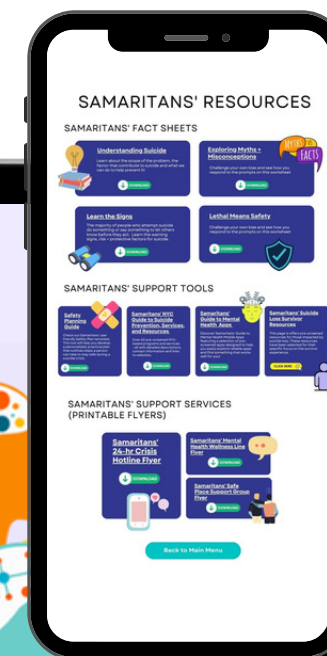
EXPLORE RESOURCES



RESOURCE GUIDE



RESOURCE HUB



MOBILE APPS

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THANK YOU FOR
PARTICIPATING
TODAY!



SAMARITANS' RESOURCE HUB
bit.ly/SamsResourceHub

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