

# Listen! September is National Suicide Prevention Month

By News Desk | SEPT. 16, 2020

#BeThe1To **Be There.**

**If your friend is thinking about suicide,  
listen to their reasons for feeling hopeless and in pain.**

**Listen without judgment and with compassion and empathy.**

Find out why this can save a life at [BeThe1To.com](http://BeThe1To.com).  
If you're struggling, call the Lifeline at

**1-800-273-TALK (8255)**



MHA-NYC  
Mental Health America  
SUICIDE  
PREVENTION  
LIFELINE  
1-800-273-TALK

To co-fans of adrenaline-pumping “24,” I have to believe at some point in that series you’ve yelled at the TV screen, “Listen to Jack!” For gosh sakes, he’s trying to save the world in 24 hours. Stop explaining your situation to him. Stop discounting what he’s telling you. Listen. Hear what he’s telling you.

It seems so obvious when others should shut up and listen. It seems so obvious when not listening is making everything worse.

Yet, sadly, I’m positive that when someone has been sharing with me, I’ve repeatedly egregiously committed the sins of thinking about and forming in my head what I’ll jump in and say the minute she pauses, gone into advice mode or, worse yet, told my story that was clearly so much worse than his.

September is National Suicide Prevention Month. Maybe it should be National Truly Listen Month.

This is not to place blame on those who have lost loved ones to suicide. But as we look forward to prevention—listening is critical.

And just as we all feel as if First Aid is all our jobs—using AED defibrillator machines, bandaging a cut—we need to apply the same feeling to mental health. EMTs can’t be everywhere. Mental health professionals can’t be everywhere. We all must learn how to step in and help someone in need.

Listening is one way—both so simple and yet, sometimes, so difficult.

Listen to understand. Create a safe space for others to share their experiences with you.

Don’t judge. Don’t problem solve. Don’t try to make them feel better. Listen. Reflect.

If someone gives us their phone number, we automatically repeat it back to the person to make sure we got it. Yet, when someone shares her most vulnerable moments or personal emotions, we rarely pause to reflect.

“That must make you sad.”

“I could see how that would be frustrating.”

“That must really (fill in the blank)”—hurt, be scary, make you angry, be exciting, etc.

The goal is to hear the person’s story. Understand what he is going through. Acknowledge her emotions. Validate.

When we reflect what we’re hearing back to the person. amazing things can happen. She may correct us. He likely will say, “Yeah,” and go on to share even more amazing

things with us that we'd never have learned if we hadn't simply listened and reflected versus pulling the focus back to us.

Let the person share. Encourage it. Make it safe. There can be time for problem-solving later.

Acknowledge that the person has shared something important with you: "I know that must have been hard to share, but I very much appreciate that you did."

Jumping in to one-up them with my story? That ends their story without validating it. It says: My story is more important than yours. I know what you are feeling because here's my story. But it's your story. Not theirs. How they feel may differ from what you felt, and you won't even know because you've already moved on.

Jumping in with solutions? That also ends their story without validating it. I have the answers. How can you be so dense as to not see all the easy answers here? Stop whining. Use my fix.

Jumping in and telling the person to feel better or "at least, blah, blah, blah." That again ends their story without validating it. It tells them how to feel versus allowing them to feel. It assumes that if you can think of something worse, then their story has no validity.

**It's National Suicide Prevention Month.**

**The next time someone shares something with you, reflect her emotion back to her. There will be time for your story. Hear his story now.**

**National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255**