

## **Workers' Responses in the Dark Times**

This document contains contributions from Taylor and Tahlia (pseudonyms). If you would like to respond to this document, or add to it, please email Loretta Pederson: [loretta.pederson@tfs.org.au](mailto:loretta.pederson@tfs.org.au)

We are women who have experienced dark thoughts and survived. We want to share our hard won wisdom with you, to assist you in helping others. Please listen to our words with respect.

### What Has Been Most Helpful

Listening to the pain and sadness: When you ask questions about how the thoughts are affecting me, this lets me know that you are really listening. I know that you are interested in what is happening to me.

Trust: It takes time to build trust. Over time it is easier to talk about something traumatic. Saying something out loud is hard. If there is less trust I would prefer to write the words down.

Building connection: It helps to build connection when I have the same person each time. I don't have to worry about judgement, when the counsellor already knows my story. I can hear your attitude and warmth in your voice.

The regularity is important: Knowing that it is the same person I see each week is very important. She gets to know me and she can read when I seem low or have a headache and can't concentrate and she asks me about it. Then she gives me options that we can cut the session short, and we go with the flow. In the beginning it helped to build trust by having the same worker. Having the same time each week is helpful too. The thoughts tell me not to turn up to my appointment, so having a regular time helps me prepare myself.

High spirits: At Playgroup the leader has very high spirits and her positiveness makes me want to stay for the whole time, when the thoughts are telling me to leave early.

### What Has Not Been Helpful

Just asking about safety: When a mental health worker only asked me about safety, it felt like she wasn't interested in how I was feeling or how hard things are. Once she knew I wasn't going to kill myself, she moved to another topic.

Being allocated a new worker: It is unhelpful when I find out I've been given a new worker. Even if my story is written down, it is not the same as the counsellor hearing it from me. I don't like having to repeat it all again. It then takes time again to feel understood rather than dismissed.

Arrogance/rushing: when the psychiatrist rushes my appointment and only gives me 3 minutes, it feels like he is being arrogant, and that I'm not listened to. He only asks about repeats for scripts. This makes me angry, especially when I report side effects and he says 'Well that's medication - keep going with it.'

Intensity: With the mental health team it is either every day phone calls, which feels too intense, or a drought where they don't call at all. A 5 second phone call asking if I'm okay or if I have suicidal thoughts is just annoying. If you are going to call, make it a worthwhile conversation, otherwise it seems like you are 'just doing your job'. Please don't call when the kids have just gotten home from school. Everyone is loud and making demands – this is not a good time to be asked if I'm suicidal!

Breaking Trust: When workers aren't transparent about calling Community Services (child protection) it breaks trust. I can't work with you if I don't understand why you think my suicidal thoughts are a risk to the kids. I can't speak to you if I don't trust you.