



Live session 2:

First Aid for suicidal crisis and depression

Activity 4: Analyse the impact of suicidal feelings

The following is an extract from a book by Virginia Ironside, “Janey and Me: Growing up with My Mother”, published in 2003 in the UK by Fourth Estate. It has been reproduced here by kind permission of the author.

The book was written by Virginia Ironside at a particular point in her life. Virginia has suffered from depression since childhood and had thoughts about suicide on a number of occasions. She has found benefit from different prescribed medications and cognitive behavioural therapy. She is a journalist, author and agony aunt and has her own website, www.virginiaironside.org, which offers advice on a number of health and relationship matters.

“Soon I’ll be 30 and able to commit suicide. I’m so withdrawn, I can’t feel or see or hear or understand even the simplest things. I am very unhappy and confused. I spent this afternoon asleep in bed. A typical day... I’ve never known reality. Never in my life. I’ve had feelings but they have been cockeyed feelings. I don’t think I’ll ever be able to jump into life...I don’t think I’ll ever get better...I sometimes look at people and they look as if they’re at the end of a long telescope they’re so far away. As if we are blocked by sheets of thick glass between us. As if I’m invulnerable. And horrible. I am...I’m so alone. I’m even alone from myself...I am not well at all...I just feel clobbered. I can’t even cry at films now or songs or anything. I just sit and stare at my watch to count the hours away or just sleep.”

Your instructor will ask you to either work in small groups or as a whole group to discuss the following questions:

What is the impact of this excerpt on you?

How can you tell if someone is having suicidal thoughts?

What would you do if someone told you they were thinking about suicide?

Activity 5: Case studies 1–4

(to be completed in live session)

Demonstrate methods used to talk to someone who may have suicidal thoughts.

In your groups read the case study and consider the questions.

Case study 1

You meet an elderly neighbour whose wife died suddenly a few months ago. He was an active person you would see out in the garden in all weathers, but you have not seen him for a while.

You ask him how he is doing since his wife died. He tells you that he is not doing so well. He keeps waking up early in the morning after a disturbed night. He has lost his appetite and isn't much of a cook; his wife did all that. They had been married for 50 years. His only son lives in Australia. He says that he would be better off dead as he has nothing to live for. He had thought he might go to his GP but he doesn't think there is anything she will be able to do for him.

How would you apply ALGEE to assist your neighbour?

Case study 2

You have a video call with your friend and hear that she has just learned that she is 8 weeks pregnant. She has been in a relationship for the past 3 years and has two school-age children from a previous relationship. Her current partner also has two children. She has not told him that she is pregnant yet.

She has broken all ties with her own family, from whom she has had little support over the years, particularly when she was a single parent. This increases her sense of isolation.

She works part-time but needs to be home when the children return from school. She is worried that another baby will mean that she will have to give up work and this will be an additional strain on her relationship. She does not know what to do and feels that she is in a corner. She breaks down in tears while she is telling you this, and says she feels like she can't go on.

How would you apply ALGEE to assist your friend?

Live session 2: First Aid for suicidal crisis and depression

Case study 3

You are concerned about your friend. He is 28 years old and you have known him since you were at high school. You play five-a-side football together every week and usually go for a pint afterwards. You have noticed a change in him over the last few months. He was made redundant and has had a couple of temporary posts but nothing has worked out long term. He tells you he feels useless. He says he cannot go on and that life is not worth living.

Things have deteriorated between him and his wife; she is sleeping in the spare bedroom. He loves her but thinks she doesn't want him anymore.

He thinks that she and the kids would be better off without him; they could make a new start. As he tells you this he becomes tearful.

How would you apply ALGEE to assist your friend?

Case study 4

Nineteen-year-old Ella is a student of yours who has been on a downward swing since her first year at university. When Ella first started she was a hard worker, consistently getting good grades, but they have been steadily dropping.

You are concerned about her performance, so decide to organise a meeting to find out more. Ella arrives late and seems very tired, anxious and dishevelled, struggling to make eye contact. You start the conversation highlighting your concerns about her drop in performance and ask her what might be going on. Ella seems on the verge of tears and quietly whispers that she is finding everything very hard at the moment. When you gently enquire what she is finding hard she goes on to explain that she finds it difficult to remember things and to concentrate in her lectures. She says she often feels isolated, homesick and worries a lot about her increasing levels of debt.

Ella says she has lost interest in most of her daily activities and 'cries at everything'. She says her flatmates tell her she 'moans a lot', is antisocial, and does not like 'normal' student interests. She says that she has made hardly any friends and spends most of her time in her room because she thinks no one likes her. As Ella is telling you this, she breaks down in tears and says she 'can't go on like this anymore, what's the point.'

How would you apply ALGEE to assist Ella?