

# CHANGING THE NARRATIVE: RESPONDING TO DISTRESS

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Jonathan's Voice

[www.jonathansvoice.org.uk](http://www.jonathansvoice.org.uk)

Registered Charity 1180424



# Self-care during delivery

Thank you for being here today

- Today, we acknowledge World Suicide Prevention Day – 10th September  
A time to reflect, remember, and raise awareness
- This year's theme: "Changing the Narrative – Start the Conversation"
- What to expect today: A safe, respectful, and inclusive space. If anything raises any distressing issues for you, please take care of yourself during and after.



# Our Mission

- To open up the conversation about mental health in the workplace and to provide resources to organisations and individuals in order to support good mental health so all may thrive.
- Most importantly, we want to break down the stigma which prevents people from opening up about their mental health



**Jonathan's Voice**  
Speaking out for mental health

# Introduction to Jonathan's Voice



- Jonathan was a patent attorney in Bristol. On the outside, life appeared to be going well. But a month after his 35th birthday he tragically took his own life on 30th October 2017. An “out of the blue” suicide. Sadly, he had been masking his mental health struggles very, very well.

**Shortly after this tragic event his family founded Jonathan's Voice, now a registered charity, to promote better mental health in the workplace.**



# Webinar Outcomes

## Understand

- Why people experiencing suicidal distress often stay silent – and how attachment and fear of judgement play a role.
- What distress can look like – and who is most likely to notice it.
- How to have compassionate, supportive conversations.
- How to foster psychologically safe environments in the workplace.
- How to support others – and take care of yourself – if affected



# Suicidal distress

- Despite growing awareness, many people struggling with suicidal thoughts never disclose them.
- Hallford et al (2023) found that 50–60% of people do not disclose their suicidal ideation or behaviours to other people
- Silence isn't just about not wanting help — it often reflects *how safe* someone feels in their relationships and social environment



# Attachment

Attachment theory suggests that the way we form bonds early in life influences how we seek help later.

- Secure attachment: People are more likely to disclose distress, expecting support and understanding.
- Insecure or avoidant attachment: Individuals may expect rejection, criticism, or abandonment — making silence feel safer.
- Ihme et al (2022) found that individuals with avoidant attachment and childhood trauma are likely to present a high suicide risk in adulthood
- The very people who most need connection may have learned not to ask for it.



# Fear of Judgement and Social Stigma

Stigma around suicide and mental health can make disclosure feel risky:

- Fear of damaging professional reputation or personal relationships.
- Cultural/religious taboos that frame suicidal thoughts as shameful.
- This creates a “double bind”: suffering in silence to avoid judgement, but increasing isolation and despair





# Understanding silence is not about blame but context

## Practical implications:

- Creating safe relational spaces — where people feel heard, not judged.
- Proactive checking in — don't assume silence means someone is okay.
- Reducing stigma — openly discussing mental health and suicide reduces fear of disclosure.
- Trauma-informed approaches — recognising that attachment wounds may shape disclosure patterns.



# What distress can look like

Distress doesn't always show up as someone saying, "*I'm struggling.*" In fact, it often shows up in the following:

- Withdrawing from colleagues or meetings.
- Irritability or sensitivity to feedback.
- Noticeable fatigue, agitation, or lack of motivation
- Missed deadlines, increased absenteeism, or presenteeism (turning up but disengaged).
- Repeated mentions of feeling overwhelmed, hopeless, or burned out



# Why it matters

- When distress is recognised early, it creates opportunities for timely, compassionate intervention.
- But recognition alone isn't enough: workplaces need a culture where it feels safe to check in, and where distress is met with support, not judgement.

*“You don't need to diagnose or fix — you just need to notice, listen, and signpost.”*



# Hold in mind ....

- Not everyone sees the same signals. In workplaces, different roles and relationships shape who may pick up on distress first
- Sometimes it's not the "formal" relationships, but the informal ones that matter.
- A work friend, mentor, or someone the person feels safe with is often the one who hears first if distress is voiced.



# Breaking the silence

- Suicidal thoughts can be accompanied by intense guilt or shame.
- Individuals may feel they're "failing" or undeserving of support.
- This can create an isolating cycle: distress → silence → deeper distress.

*"Notice the changes, trust your instincts, and reach out. That moment of connection may be the one that makes a difference."*



# ARC of Support

- **A – Breaking the silence**  
Encouraging open and honest conversations about mental health.
- **R – Reducing stigma**  
Helping people feel safe to ask for help.
- **C – Creating hope**  
Reminding others they are not alone, and that help is available

**A simple conversation can save a life**



# Compassionate Conversations

## What is Compassion?

- Compassion is more than noticing suffering; it's the *authentic desire to help*.
- It moves us from awareness to action — not just “I see you’re struggling,” but “I want to support you”.
- Be curious
- Be present
- Connecting to the Right Support



# The role of empathy

- Empathy is about dialling down your own thoughts, feelings, judgements, attitudes and being able to just step into seeing it purely from another persons perspective. Imagining how it feels from their perspective not your own.
- Empathy isn't fixed — it's a skill anyone can learn and strengthen with practice.





# Connecting to the Right Support

- Ask what might help, rather than assuming what they need.
- Know what's available internally: HR, line manager, Employee Assistance Programme (EAP), wellbeing services, peer networks.
- Signpost to external resources: helplines, charities, GP/healthcare providers, crisis services.  
<https://hubofhope.co.uk>
- Follow up — checking back later shows genuine care and keeps the door open



# Building Psychologically Safe Workplaces

- When workplaces are safe, people are more likely to talk about distress before it reaches crisis

## Be Proactive

- **Normalise** – make wellbeing part of everyday conversations
- **Model** – show vulnerability and lead with openness
- **Support** – create simple, consistent practices that make it safe to speak up



# Supporting Others While Caring for Yourself

## **CONNECT**

- Be present and compassionate
- Small acts of connection remind others they are not alone

## **ACKNOWLEDGE**

- Supporting someone in distress will have an impact on you
- Notice your own emotional and physical responses

## **CARE**

- Practise self-compassion and healthy boundaries
- Debrief with someone you trust
- Use wellbeing strategies that help you restore



# Intention Setting

## Take a moment to reflect:

- What is **one small action** you will do to care for yourself or support others after today?
- How will you make space for this intention in the coming week?

### *Examples:*

- Scheduling a “butterfly moment” each day.
- Checking in with a colleague.
- Using workplace wellbeing resources.
- **Remember:** Small, consistent actions create long-lasting change.



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# What do we do?

- We focus on those who work in the intellectual property sector and associated professions.
- We work alongside professional institutions and individual firms as well as CIPA, CITMA and IP Inclusive to help develop mentally healthy workplaces where all may thrive.
- We provide workshops, webinars and resources. As a charity, we can offer these free at the point of delivery (relying on fundraising and donations).
- We also fund vital research into better understanding of male suicide and preventative steps.



All available to download  
free of charge from  
[www.jonathansvoice.org.uk](http://www.jonathansvoice.org.uk)





# Where to get help

- Your GP or practice nurse, especially if you have physical symptoms that need checking out; in a crisis call 111, 999 or go to A & E
- Hub of hope <https://hubofhope.co.uk/>
- Your line manager, supervisor or colleague
- Human Resources
- Mental Health First Aider or Mental Health champion
- Employee Assistance Programme, if you have one
- For student members of CIPA, there's also the Informals' MHFAer support line via [informalswelfare@gmail.com](mailto:informalswelfare@gmail.com) (see <https://yellowsheet.wordpress.com/access-to-mental-health-first-aiders-and-support-helplines/>).
- LawCare <https://www.lawcare.org.uk/> 0800 279 6888
- Samaritans <https://www.samaritans.org/> 116 123
- Calmzone <https://www.thecalmzone.net/> 0800 585858



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# Find out more about us

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