

Unanswered questions

The question 'Why did they take their life?' is complex and may never be fully resolved. There is no simple answer to why someone ends their own life. Factors associated with suicide are varying and complex. It is usually not just one thing that compels someone to consider suicide. There are many individual, social and contextual factors that influence on a person's decision to end their own life.

Some factors associated with suicide may include:

- Distressing life events (e.g. relationship breakdown, unemployment).
- Current acute stress (e.g. workplace stress).
- Mental health conditions.
- Experiencing abuse or trauma (including natural disasters).
- Chronic pain or physical health condition.
- Social pressure.
- Experiencing loss (e.g. of a person, social position, home, lifestyle).
- Feeling trapped, hopeless and helpless.
- A sense of unbearable psychological pain.
- Feel that they are a burden to others and loved ones would be better off without them.
- A sense of isolation or lack of belonging.
- Think their problems are unsolvable and they feel out of control.
- Unable to find a reason to make living worthwhile.

Also, many people who experience these factors do not think of ending their own life. But those who do want the pain to stop, and at the time, view death as the only option to stop pain. It is a decision that the person made at that time. At another time they may have made another decision.

The cup analogy

There is a cup sitting on a table. It is so full, it is rounded at the top. One or two drops are added to the cup and it spills over. What caused the water to spill?

We want to blame the last one or two drops, but in an empty cup the water would not have spilled. It wasn't the water in the cup prior to the drops being added, because if left alone, it would not have spilled. It was a combination of all the drops of water in the cup that came before, and the last one or two drops that caused the water to spill.

In a person's life, the water in the cup is symbolic of the accumulation of events, hurt, pain, shame, humiliation, and loss in their life journey. The last couple of drops symbolises the trigger events – the event or situation which preceded the final act of taking their own life. Often we want to blame the trigger events, but this does not make sense to us. Like the water, these events by themselves would not cause someone to take their own life.

It is a combination of everything in the person's life, and the last one or two things, that caused the person to lose hope, feel helpless and take their own life.

(Adapted from Iris Bolton in Hope for Life 2013)

Keep asking 'why' until you no longer need to.

Some people find an answer that they are comfortable with.

Where others find comfort by acknowledging that they may never know why their loved one came to the decision to end their life.