

LIFE IS PRECIOUS



Naresh Agarwal

How to help prevent suicides in Sikkim

This has been a difficult column for me to write. Faces of a few people come to mind – a friend’s younger brother, a sister’s friend’s younger sister – jovial and smiling faces who decided to end their lives prematurely. I think of another friend’s narration who witnessed his close friend hand him a note, took off his slippers and then jumped off the balcony of a building before his very eyes. There have been numerous reports lately of increasing suicides in Sikkim, with some citing our beautiful and peaceful state’s dubious distinction as one with the highest suicide rate in the country.

Life, by its very definition, is difficult. Ask yourself if your life is easy and the answer is likely to be ‘No’. Ask your mother, your father, your close friend, your colleague, the person on the street if his or her life is easy, and the answer is likely to be in the negative. As Siddhartha discovered as he became the Buddha, “The world is full of suffering.” Disease, age-related pain and suffering, or death are always lurking around the corner. When these are not around, we make life difficult through discord or quarrel. As a constant, there is the never-ending struggle for food, clothing and shelter – both for ourselves and our loved ones. Increasingly, there is also the pressure to aspire for everything we think we ought to have but we don’t have.

So, how is it that when life is difficult for each one of us, many of us find the courage to face it squarely

while some of us decide to call it quits and end it before our time comes?

It really depends on our perspective. With an increasing economic boom, one might increasingly find oneself in situations where a friend or relative or neighbour is doing exceedingly well – at least that’s what it appears from the outside – and one might

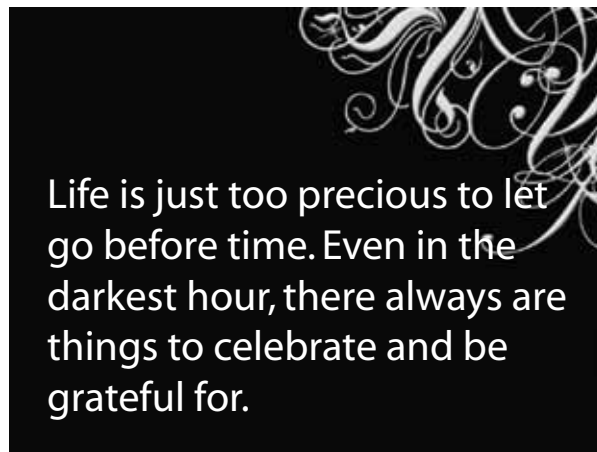
get a feeling of being inadequate. Other sources of insecurities might come by based on dissatisfaction with one’s looks, appearance, talent and skills, sexuality, intellect, etc. There could be a variety of reasons to make one insecure.

One of the primary things to remember is that comparison breeds insecurity and dissatisfaction. By

comparing, we focus on things that we don’t have, rather than being grateful for those that we do. Seen in the right perspective, we might have many things to be grateful about – well-functioning limbs and organs, pollution-free air, friends, family, etc. The need is to draw inspiration from within us, not outside of us. At the very least, we have every right to be alive just as everyone else does.

If you have or are contemplating suicide?

My advice would be, “Don’t”. Life is just too precious to let go before time. Even in the darkest hour, there always are things to celebrate and be grateful for. There is always a strong reason to keep living. Remember, everything in the world is ever



changing. Never forget that “this too shall pass!”. As a song says, “When something seems bad, turn it around, and find something good.” There is great value in service. The moment we expand our horizon to think beyond ourselves and extend the circle to think about our friends, our community, our country, we realize that there are a lot of people who need help. Instead of thinking of quitting, think of dedicating your life to the cause of helping others.

If you feel like you want to die or kill yourself, or you feel hopeless or that you have no reason to live, seek help! Contact friends and family where you may get social support. Make sure your surroundings are safe. Do not act on impulse.

If you know of a friend or family member who talks about suicide?

Look out for signs of distress. Be willing to talk to and understand the person without judging or faulting the person for the feelings he or she might be going through. Make sure the surroundings are safe. Ask if the person has a plan for how he or she wants to end one’s life. There is reason to be deeply concerned if the person has a plan. Seek help from your family and friends, and other governmental and non-governmental organizations. The person might need counselling, therapy and social support.

If you are a concerned citizen who wants to do something to help?

Form social support groups and lobby for hotlines with 24x7 support where people in distress can call for help. People must be trained to provide this support.

Look out for people in your family and neighbourhood who might be alone, isolated or distressed. Normally, people who end their lives are known to leave many signs seeking help, which people around often do not take seriously until it is late. Look out for signs of depression. Depression is a condition affecting many people and can be contained and cured through therapy and medication.

Government agencies, NGOs and researchers must come together to investigate the reasons behind the high incidence of suicides in Sikkim. Once we understand the reasons and identify patterns, we might be in a position to intervene and do something to stop people from ending their lives.

Do not let this issue die down. No person should end one’s life for lack of help. Let us end this apathy now! Look out! We must be there for each other!

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