

trary, improvement in the level of depression often enhances the ability to act on previously made suicide plans. The energy level is now sufficient to enable the person to carry through with her intent.

A most important factor in the intervention and prevention of suicidal behaviour is the ability to be available, to listen, and to empathize. It is not necessary to invent solutions or quick cures for someone's misfortunes. A key ingredient may be to help design an action plan and ask such questions as, "What is going on right now? How is the individual reacting? What appears to be helpful? What isn't working?" Promoting options and alternatives might be the start of solving a complex problem. It may be of some consequence to share the responsibility with competent helpers and alleviate the burden of aiding a distressed individual by ourselves. In time of stress, it is paramount to emphasize past strengths and build confidence. For example, following her divorce, Joanne viewed herself as a failure although she was recognized as an expert in her highly technical profession. We should encourage a suicidal person to seek treatment that is effective for her. Intimate feelings can be shared only in an atmosphere of trust, respect, and consideration.

Individuals who attempt suicide are crying out for help not only for themselves but for the people they love. Women often ask for assistance when it is too late and a suicide attempt is the outcome. Men may wait even longer and their solution to the problem results in a suicide death. To talk about helpless, angry, frustrating, and sad feelings is a difficult task. Yet a suicide attempt can be a dangerous and life-threatening method of asking for help. Reaching out for support during a crisis requires a special kind of courage. The first time aid is requested is usually the most difficult. Delaying a wish to die and seeking help will re-establish hope and confidence. Life may not always be easy but learning to deal with its problems expands our skills and allows for growth.

off target

three teenagers—
nineteen eighteen sixteen—
break and enter
pilfer
threaten
rape
threaten
pilfer
leave
their brother's girlfriend

four days later she charges them
officially—
the police doctor notes
her bruised thighs
but the cop on duty
won't see her alone
and the trio in another room
listen

down the road
she's set upon
by the sister of the oldest boy
pulling her hair
cracking her skull on the pavement:
my brother's in enough trouble already
says the street fighter
off target

two days later headaches blind
vomiting begins:
the women in the refuge
sit with the shaking lass
throughout the night
and concussion passes

when it's light
she drops the charges
baby brother can rest easy

note: because this woman dropped the charges, the matter will be considered one more false allegation in police files.

Astra

Poem from *Battle Cries* by Astra, 1981, Ultra Violet Enterprises, London, England.