



The Suicidal Mind

Edwin S. Shneidman

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Suicide haunts our literature and our culture, claiming the lives of ordinary people and celebrities alike. It is now the third leading cause of death for fifteen- to twenty-four-year-olds in the United States, raising alarms across the nation about the rising tide of hopelessness seen in our young people. It is a taboo subtext to our successes and our happiness, a dark issue that is often euphemized, avoided, and little understood. In our century, psychology and psychiatry alike have attempted to understand, prevent, and medicalize these phenomena. But they have failed, argues Dr. Edwin Shneidman, because they have lost sight of the plain language, the ordinary everyday words, the pain and frustrated psychological needs of the suicidal individual.

In *The Suicidal Mind*, Dr. Shneidman has written a groundbreaking work for every person who has ever thought about suicide or knows anybody who has contemplated it. The book brims with insight into the suicidal impulse and with helpful suggestions on how to counteract it. Shneidman presents a bold and simple premise: the main cause of suicide is psychological pain or "psychache." Thus the key to preventing suicide is not so much the study of the structure of the brain, or the study of social statistics, or the study of mental diseases, as it is the direct study of human emotions. To treat a suicidal individual, we need to identify, address, and reduce the individual's psychache. Shneidman shares with the reader his knowledge, both as a clinician and researcher, of the psychological drama that plays itself out in the suicidal mind through the exploration of three moving case studies. We meet Ariel, who set herself on fire; Beatrice, who cut herself with the intent to die; and Castro, a young man who meant to shoot his brains out but survived, horribly disfigured. These cases are presented in the person's own words to reveal the details of the suicidal drama, to show that the purpose of suicide is to seek a solution, to illustrate the pain at the core of suicide, and to isolate the common stressor in suicide: frustrated psychological needs. Throughout, Shneidman offers practical, explicit maneuvers to assist in treating a suicidal individual--steps that can be taken by concerned friends or family and professionals alike.

Suicide is an exclusively human response to extreme psychological pain, a lonely and desperate solution for the sufferer who can no longer see any alternatives. In this landmark and elegantly written book, Shneidman provides the language, not only for understanding the suicidal mind, but for understanding ourselves.

Anyone who has ever considered suicide, or knows someone who has, will find here a wealth of insights to help understand and to prevent suicide.

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Amy Nichols:

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