

Audio Transcript for Episode 511: “What Not To Say or Do When Someone Is Struggling With Suicide” with Deanna Zandt

Please note: This transcript has been lightly edited to remove filler words or sounds.

DEANNA ZANDT: You are not a burden. You are a human. You are a whole, fully formed human living in a world that is very, very challenging.

[music playing]

CHAD MOSES: You're listening to the To Write Love on Her Arms podcast, a show about mental health and the things that make us human. I'm your host Chad Moses, and in each episode, we'll be talking about the things that can often feel hard to talk about, like depression, addiction, self-injury, and suicide. We'll be sharing stories and exploring big themes like hope, healing, and recovery. If any of the topics we discuss or the stories we share feel too heavy for you, know that it's OK to pause, restart, or stop altogether. As we discover new stories, we hope to remind you that your story is important.

[music playing]

CHAD:

This episode is a part of our You Are Not a Burden campaign in honor of September being Suicide Prevention Month. You can learn more about the campaign by going to youarenotaburden.com.

In 2018, after Kate Spade and Anthony Bourdain died by suicide, Deanna Zandt felt compelled to address the well-intentioned, but perhaps vague words of encouragement others were offering those in the midst of a mental struggle. That piece is titled “Why ‘you are loved’ & ‘please reach out’ are crappy things to post after someone has died by suicide” and it explores the way in which our words and actions can help or hurt someone struggling. In today's episode, we're honored to be joined by Deanna to explore her perspective and thoughts on how we can genuinely support and show up for someone who's thinking about suicide.

Deanna Zandt (she/her) is a writer, artist, and award-winning technologist living in Brooklyn, NY. She spent 15 years working at the forefront of social justice, technology and media; after she burned out for the third time, she realized that maybe that work wasn't suiting her particularly well. Currently, she spends her time supporting other very impressive people and organizations behind-the-scenes with their technology, writing & drawing when she feels like it, walking and playing with her two dogs and their friends, connecting with humans near and far, and figuring out how to exist with meaning, fulfillment, and as many giggles as possible.

So without further ado, I am your host Chad Moses. Let's get started.

[music playing]

CHAD

Deanna, thank you so much for joining us today. Where are you? You're in Brooklyn currently?

DEANNA

I am in Brooklyn, currently. Thank you for having me. So great to be here.

CHAD

It's a thrill to be with you. We first learned about you through a piece. On Medium. This actually all came into focus through our editor and producer Becky doing some research and stumbled across a piece that you wrote in 2018 that was called, "Why 'you are loved' and 'please reach out' are crappy things to post after someone has died by suicide." That is, you know, we're definitely sympathetic to elongated titles. It's important, it begs the question, you got us hooked, we identify a problem. And now we want to learn how to do better. So could you start just by telling us what inspired you to write a piece about suicide, and maybe just sharing just some of the context on how suicide has impacted your life?

DEANNA

Sure. I wrote the piece because I was mad. Most things that I make are because I got mad at some point and knowing, you know, fingers fly on keyboards and pencils fly in hands. And so that's what happens. But I got really frustrated, it was the week that Kate Spade and Anthony Bourdain both died by suicide and people were understandably, really, really devastated. It was an unbelievably painful, cultural moment, to lose people that were really admired, that their work, you know, was really beloved. And so people started posting things online saying, as the title says, you know, if you're feeling like this, just know, you are loved. And if you're feeling this way, you know, please reach out to me, I'm here for you. And like, I completely understand the sentiment of that, right? Like, I completely understand the intention, but the people that were posting those things to me seemed like okay, you never actually experienced what it's like to be in the dark waters as I call them and swimming in the dark waters. And, you know, with my own experience, I think my own experience with suicide ideation is probably on the less intense end of things and that I never planned anything I've never attempted, but still pretty scary for someone who's never had ideation at all. My whole thing was that I was in so much emotional pain and dealing with physical stuff and physical ramifications of that that I wanted to be rid of my pain. I didn't want my life to end but I did not want to live in pain anymore. And I think that that's a really common thread that I hear from other people once I started talking about of course, you get other people kind of in the conversation and I thought at the time before I started sharing this stuff, you know, when it really, really kicked in excessively from 2006 to about 2013. I thought that everyone had these feelings all the time and that I just couldn't handle it, that I was weak, that I didn't have the skills or that, like there was something fundamentally wrong with me that I couldn't handle what everyone else was obviously feeling it all the time. And so, yeah. So when I was looking at this, you are loving, like, I know, I know, I'm loved. But everything really hurts. That's not the point. And so yeah, I decided to write a little bit about what it's like to be on the other side, at least from my own experience.

CHAD

You brought out a fascinating perspective there one that even after 14 years of working in this world, it felt a little unfamiliar, but I think even then, full of grace, you mentioned, believing that there were other people who felt this way, who felt despair, who felt pain unimaginable, and seeking options to relieve such pain. And you figured that there was something unique about your situation, and that you were handling it perhaps worse than others that you imagine. I feel like so often people don't share how they feel because they're afraid that what they're feeling is utterly unrelatable.

DEANNA

Yeah, and like, I didn't know, it was wrong, like even I was in therapy at the time, and I wasn't sharing until it really became overwhelming, where I got to the point where I wasn't functioning very well as like a grown human who needed to work and pay rent. And I had opted finally to, to get medication, and to go on antidepressants, and I had been basically putting it off, I had been recommended it when I was a young adult in college and put it off for basically 20 years. 20 years later, I'm sitting in front of a

prescribing shrink, and I'm describing how I'm feeling, you know, to a brand new person, basically, it's from, you know, not my regular talk therapist. And he said, How long have you been this depressed? And I said, Oh, I'm not depressed, I just can't do anything that I want to do. Like, it still wasn't clicking for me that, you know, this was the point that I was at. And since that time, I have worked with a different therapist, who's really wonderful and introduced me to dialectical behavior therapy. Yeah. Big DBT fan, but just the idea in DBT that you start by naming your emotion in every session was radical for me to be able to say, Oh, I'm, I'm sad. I feel sad. I feel sad. I am not a sad person. But I feel sad right now, or I'm not a happy person, but I feel happy right now. You know, that practice is really groundbreaking and it can shift things. So yeah, I didn't. I wasn't even reporting my symptoms, because they didn't know they were symptoms. I just thought, Oh, my God, I can't cope. Like I can't do this. I can't. I can't human like the other humans.

CHAD

Was there any degree to which you related to the idea of being a burden of maybe what you were going through or the things that you wish you could feel but you can't, the things you wish you could do but couldn't, that they weren't worth sharing? Because you don't want to bring someone else down, you don't want to weigh down the room. You don't want to be something carried or dragged or even cared for, you know?

DEANNA

Even cared for, yeah, I think that that was something else that was a radical shift for me was later than becoming friends with people for whom this wasn't this wasn't burdensome, that this was like no, this is everyday life that we share. And we swim in these waters together. And that's how we do. And that was just an entirely different experience. The whole burden thing is so insidious. It is insidious in every way when the demons latch on to the feeling of you're burdening someone else with your problems or you're burdening them because you need care or you're burdening them because you can't work right now and somebody else has to do the work, whatever that work is. Parenting, all of those things like you feel that demon latch on, and it is so hard to get rid of. And, yeah, the burden thing. It's a lie. It's a lie. That's what I keep wanting to scream is like a burden? You are not a burden, you are a human, you are a wholly, fully formed human living in a world that is very, very challenging.

CHAD

Deanna, you strike me as someone overflowing with empathy. And I saw a ton of that empathy in this piece that you wrote. And I think so much of it as we talk about suicide prevention, as we talked about just the the problem of suicide. So often, it's just relegated to conversations of being a mental health problem. When we know that this is a human health problem, that there are physical health factors, there are social health factors, there are community health factors.

DEANNA

Yeah, the systemic issues that are associated with depression and suicide ideation and attempts. For me as a social justice-oriented person, like I kind of always look towards like, well, what are the systemic things, when you look at suicide rates among farmers, that particular kind of despair, that of the despair of livelihood, of not being able to provide for your family of any gender, it's generally considered a very masculine thing, but among all genders, is just stunning. And that is purely systemic, that is purely a fault of, of this particular version of capitalism that we live in.

CHAD

Yeah, let's expand it to a cultural health problem, right. So again, like just kind of riding that wave of empathy, just even mentioning our friends that work in agriculture and farming and food production, textile

production, you name whatever there is to be, to be farmed out there. This requires, this being suicide prevention, requires, like you mentioned way more than just giving someone the right platitude at the right time. Or just giving that encouragement so that they can get through this, it isn't a Us and Them thing. It's only us we have to be a piece of the equation that's going to require imagination, of stepping outside of your own lived experience to empathize with the livelihood of someone else. And also active community making, ask the questions where your imagination ends, that's when communication needs to ramp up and see where people are. And communication has to leave room for response. So Deanna I'm just going to come to you going through a crisis saying You are loved. Period, end of conversation, right? That doesn't do you justice, that doesn't do this conversation justice, please reach out period. Okay. Yeah,

DEANNA

please. Like, do you know how hard it is to reach out? Like, yeah, I can't pick up my phone off of the coffee table. Like, I you know, like, I can't let alone like, call someone and say, I would like to not be alive anymore. Like how do you start that conversation and like, like, Hey, girl, I'm, so I'm thinking that being on the planet is shitty. So I'm gonna go like there's no script for that. There's no cultural space for that. There's no any of that. And I think you're spot on too, when you're talking about making it cultural, that it takes community because, you know, everything, particularly in American society is so individualistic, right? Like, we're all talking about self care right now, and this has been another big bugaboo of mine, if you just buy this, you know, \$85 self care kit, you'll be fine you'll, you'll be able to take care of yourself. And it's like, no, we need community care. We need structural care, we need all different kinds of care. And it's the same with our with our health with our cultural health and mental health.

CHAD

You mentioned just the individualistic culture that we're a part of, and, and we've established that community requires communication. I'm not a linguist, but I assume those have a common root. But let's talk a little bit about what you laid out point by point again, within the piece, you highlight ways in which people, friends, family members, and so on, can reframe how they show up for loved ones who may be feeling suicidal. So point number one is, often and you mentioned this earlier, often, the person who's struggling can't reach out, this isn't an issue of don't want to, it's can't find the steps one, two, and three, to reach out.,

DEANNA

The wherewithal, I mean, to the point where we're speaking to a friend recently, and we were sort of, you know, dark humor, talk about gallows humor is talking to your friends in making jokes about ideation. And they were sharing with me that they were having some really, really self harm oriented thoughts. And I said, Do you feel like you're, you want to plan something? and they were, like, that's too much work. I'm too tired. And I was like, I get that, you know, so it's like, if you're even in the like, it's too much work to even, you know, go down that road, like, how are you going to pick up the phone and call someone and you don't know what to say? And kind of all of those things? So yeah, that's, that's kind of the first piece and then the second piece of that. I feel like where it gets into community is that if you are noticing that people are kind of dropping out or kind of, you know, not presenting OK, or whatever. It's OK to notice that and to tell them hey, I noticed that you don't seem to be feeling OK. You know, what can I do? Like, really great phrase from a friend of mine, Jean Russell runs this project called Thriveability. She taught me the question, How can I support you right now? And I nearly melted the first time she asked me that I was as I was ranting and stuff because she really didn't know what to do. I was ranting, I was very angry. And she just looks at me with giant pretty eyes and says, How can I support you right now? And I've latched on to that ever since. There's not that you have to have the answer and just saying, Hey, I see you and I see your pain. And I'm with you and I love you is sometimes the only thing that you need to do. There's not

necessarily you can't fix it. Don't recommend how to fix it. Don't do that. Unless they've asked you for advice.

CHAD

I think that's a super important point. And in a way that we devalue or miss value, the role of empowerment in these conversations that someone walking through suicidal crisis, they oftentimes I don't want to speak for everyone's experience, but I know looking through my own experience, I didn't want to be fixed. I wanted to find a reason to continue being and you're right, I didn't want someone to wave a magic wand and for it to all go away because if it was that easy to fix, then you know that some was painful if it could just be wished away. I wanted there to be someone that would validate my perspective that would agree with me that this sucked, and, and in time, what I found to be most helpful was someone who didn't have all the answers for me, but gave me some options on where we can move forward to. So yeah, Chad, hey, whatever you want to do is fair game, if you want to go see a counselor, Hey, man, I'll do the research for you. If you need to call a hotline, buddy, I will sit right here in the sofa and hold your hand through it. Yeah. If you want to just set up a weekly coffee check in, let's do that we'll put it on the calendar right now. So my friend wasn't telling me what to do. But reminding me that there are options. Yes, some steps to take.

DEANNA

And in those options, that means that somebody else has already been through this already thought about it. And already, you know, kind of done some of that work versus like, where do you even start? I mean, because that's the other thing when somebody is in crisis, this is something that, that I help out, help friends out with a lot is if you're in crisis, or you decide it's time, it's time for you to, you know, seek some sort of therapeutic help and support in your life. Where do you even start? Like, insurance? I've had so many people ask me, How do I find a therapist? that I've started, like a spreadsheet of therapists that I can like recommend to different people wherever they are, and just like that kind of thing. Or like saying, it's really, really hard to find a therapist and I will help you do that. That's something I can do obviously within your own boundaries and whatever you're able to get, because I think that's the other thing is people who are in a supportive role, don't necessarily realize that their job is not to fix it. It is just to be there. It can feel so scary to be the person who's like, oh, my gosh, I'm trying to save my friend's life right now. It's like, No, you're not trying to save their life, you are just showing up for your friend, how can you show up for your friend, that's all you need to do.

CHAD

You were mentioning in your own personal practice of caring for friends, of being present, and being there for friends. Research that is being done not in the midst of crisis, plans being made, when stress levels are lower, more meaningful, and yielding building up this muscle memory. So when this happens, I know how to react. And I just want to applaud that. And, and again, empower anyone watching this or listening to this, that these are steps that you can take, in this moment, you can push pause on this podcast, and go to twloha.com/find-help and and memorize some of these resources. If you don't want to memorize it, just take screenshots. But the resources do indeed exist. And it's never going to be a waste of time to learn about how big our safety nets can be. So what's so let's, let's go ahead and move into point two, which builds off point one appropriately. Point one being often the person who's struggling, can't reach out and then you build on that saying, because they are unable to reach out. It can become our responsibility to start the conversation or make an effort to check in we were just kind of dancing around that point. But to whatever degree you want to dress that up a bit more. What does it look like to accept that responsibility? What does starting the conversation look like in the midst of some deep seated fears about where that conversation may lead?

DEANNA

Absolutely, because I think that fear is what stops a lot of people. I don't know what to say, I don't know what I can handle. I don't know any of those things, which is OK, that's totally OK not to know. In the piece I reference an example of an internet friend of mine, who saw one of my tweets where I was just in just such rageful despair that I felt. Clearly, real bad. And he DM'ed me and have screenshots of it with his permission and in the piece, but he was basically just like, Hey, I see you. And it looks like you're in a lot of pain. And I'm really sorry, I know, I don't know you that well, but it, it hurts to see you hurting. And that's not your burden. Like don't take that on. But I just want you to know that I remember you, and I remember you as this really kind, fun person. And I, and I think you're great. And, you know, we discussed for a minute, and then he ended the conversation with stay well, even mostly strangers love you. And that was just so different than just, you are loved. You know, like, he just added something to that in it, it took the sharp edge off for me, it took the sharp edge off of I am alone in this despair and this is never going to end. You know, because it's easy, it's easy to get there. So in the third point of it, he reached out with his comfort, um, and made sure that I knew that his worry wasn't my fault, or my concern or my burden. And I didn't even need to respond. Starting any conversation with Hey, no need to respond. But I love you. And I see you and I'm with you. Sometimes. That's all. That's all it takes. That's all it takes. So yeah, that and the combined with that thing. And the third point, which is a great, great theory that I saw in the LA Times, and it's called the second silk ring theory. And it's the silk ring theory of comfort. And it was written by a cancer survivor and her partner, they wrote this piece together about like, basically what not to say to someone with cancer. And I feel like very, very similar stuff can apply to people who are dealing with a variety of other kinds of health crises. But the idea is that the person who is suffering is in the center, and then there's concentric rings out, going out from that person. And so if you're on a ring around that person, you only add comfort in towards the middle of the ring, towards that person, towards the people closest to them. And the people who are further away, you're friends who may not be related to this person, whatever, you get to dump out to them, you get to complain to them, you get to say this hurts, you get to say I'm scared, you get to say all of those things going outward towards the circle, but only comfort goes in, only How can I support you? I'm here with you, and I love you, is this theory and I think that that's just such an easy thing to remember of like, okay, person friend in crisis, what do I need to do? Comfort, just comfort that's all I need to do is comfort.

CHAD

In Comfort being like we mentioned earlier, it's so much more than a bumper sticker doctrine. Your bumper stickers make poor band aids and band aids are not there to mend broken hearts you need. You need some deep, deep therapy. And it's important to notice that therapy doesn't always just look like therapists. Sometimes it simply means yielding to a process. So just a minute of Chad vulnerability. I love so many so many words that you mentioned someone's presence taking the edge off. Those were words Deanna that were actually said to me by my father. I lost my mother day after Valentine's Day this year after a long battle with ALS and I lived with my dad during the last couple days of mom's life and in the weeks that followed and he mentioned those words you know, just just being there. Took the edge off it blunted some of those edges and that struck me as so, so poetic. So hearing that from from someone else someone I just met today is an incredible comfort and and with that talking about this silk ring theory of comfort and who can I voice my mind pain to, it's important to have outlets for your own pain, it's important to realize that even if you weren't the the partner or spouse or child or parents of a loss of a grief impacting moment that this can still affect you. And that's okay that it does. But be mindful of where you are getting your comfort from and how you can pour comfort onto others. So like you mentioned, and we'll, we'll have that diagram available as well. But look at these circles, map yourself on the circle, not as a way to humble yourself or to elevate yourself, but just to be aware of how many people are affected. And I remember at the visitation, it was very odd seeing people come up to me, and almost expecting me

to give them comfort. And telling me about, you know, I've known your mother for six years and man did I love her. And I wanted to say, well, I guess that makes two of us, like, what do you what do you want?

DEANNA

What do you want for me?

CHAD

Like exactly and that's where, you know, I rest heavily on, on wisdom from, from traditions, like our Jewish brothers and sisters, who have a tradition of sitting Shiva of, of being just present present for seven days, not fixing it, not not heaping more pain on to the family, but being a sort of sponge, for that whatever,

DEANNA

And bringing food.

CHAD

Bringing food, making plans on their behalf, you know, doing whatever you can just to sit with the weight of it all. And that's enough.

DEANNA

I was just thinking of other situations to where another friend and crisis. I said, you know, I'm gonna come over and spend time with you. And when I got there, I said, Would you like to talk about what's going on? Can I tell you funny stories that have been happening to distract you? Do you want some distraction or comfort? Do you want to turn on the TV? What would feel okay, for right now. And, you know, who knows, she might have been talking about this endlessly for hours with other people. And by the time I got there, she just wanted to turn on brain candy, Netflix shows and just be together. And that would have been fine, too. And so, you know, even saying, just, again, coming back to that, how can I support you right now, in offering those choices can make just all the difference in the world. Another one that I like, is there's a webcomic called robot hugs. I don't know if you're familiar

CHAD

It's your fault that I am.

DEANNA

it's so great. There are so many good health related comics in their archive. And that comment that I'm thinking of one person is very sad. And the other person says, you know, what do you need right now? And the person who's very sad says, I don't know. And the person offering support says, Would you like me to make you a blanket nest and lay in it with you? And the person says, okay, and then just the final thing is them just like, nestled up in a blanket nest on the floor. And it's like, it can be that simple. It can be that simple. Just a blanket nest,

CHAD

And it can be that absurd. Yeah, I don't know if the word blanket nest really fully existed until robot hugs, put it on the printed page. But if you are navigating something that seems senseless, then we can throw some other senseless things at it to see if it works. Granted that those other senseless things can combat the confusion and aid in a sense of comfort. Yeah, let's talk about posture for a second. Okay. We agree that words are important. And when we say words are important, how words are shared are also important. So saying, you know, using this phrase you are loved. That's not a bad phrase in and of itself, but context is the sovereign power here. So that passive voice that you mentioned, you are loved. Okay.

What's a way to make that more personal, more active. Hey, I love how can I show you I love you? How can I communicate this love?

[music playing]

BECKY EBERT: Hey there, it's Becky Ebert, TWLOHA's editor and producer. I want to talk to you for a moment about something specific: T-shirts. To Write Love on Her Arms has always sold t-shirts as a way to help fund our mission—the mission of hope and help. But the products we sell in our store do so much more than help us financially. Each piece of merchandise is a conversation starter. It spreads the TWLOHA message to someone who may not have found out about us otherwise. So whether you wear our shirts, hats, hoodies, or rain jackets, we want to thank you for bringing a message of hope and help wherever you go. To see our latest designs, head to store.twloha.com now and use the promo code **PODCAST20** to receive 20% off your entire order.

[music playing]

CHAD

Let's talk about the passive voice and ways that we can curtail that, ways that we can address that. And this isn't to browbeat anyone that has employees before but we're all learning. So what are some new ways that we can go about expressing something that is true in ways that can be more readily received?

DEANNA

And just to clear up, like, the reason why you are loved bugs me so much is not the sentiment behind it. But the, the passive voice is like, I interpret it when I say you are loved, it's like, well, we're not sure who or where they are, but probably someone somewhere loves you, you know, it's like, it's just this vague, cloudy thing. And it's like, when you're in crisis, you are looking for a thread to grab on to and a thread is you know, saying, you know, I love you, and I care about you, and I hope you decide to stay here on the planet with me. You know, part of that frustration too, and this happened quite a bit. I was really overwhelmed by it when Robin Williams passed away, and so many people were like, Oh, didn't he know how loved he was? And it was like, Yeah, I'm sure he did. But that didn't alleviate the pain that he was feeling you know, for whatever variety of reasons now that we're understanding the complications of his death. You know, you're reacting to something that is very acute, and very, very painful. And thinking about how much people love you does not take that pain away. It kind of sometimes makes it worse, because you feel like a burden, you get back to the burden. So being active. And again, just asking the question, how can I show up for you just saying I'm with you.

CHAD

I want to rest on on that. You credit your friend Vu gifted you this phrase, I'm with you. I'm here. And that immediately took me to the beginning of the pandemic, we were part of a virtual music festival that was called Alone Together and I was introduced to an up and coming EDM producer. Her name is Jvna. You can find her name it's spelled J V N A and she performed a song called I'm With You. That's the chorus that's the refrain. Don't be afraid I'm with you. And like just in the thick of the pandemic not knowing how to connect with other people hearing those words were a bomb. Yeah. And being able to trust that person again that there is no passive voice because someone has already inserted their reality into yours. I'm with you. It's there. It's not some ethereal hypothetical something. Something's with you. It even goes a step beyond just saying you're not alone. Its saying I am the proof that you're not alone.

DEANNA

I agree with you and placing yourself in deep with it. You know, it also reminds me of Vu who is just an incredible human setup, the National Suicide Hotline and several other hotlines related to a domestic violence hotline, a bunch of different things as done trauma recovery and communities affected by folks who have died by suicide and just, you know, has been deep in it. We were working on a project together, which ended up becoming the weather report, which I'll send you a link to. But we wanted it to be different than other mental health tools. And we started talking about other campaigns and other tools that had kind of passed over our radar. And at the time, it was just at the tail end of the It Gets Better campaign for queer and trans kids. Which is a really great message in one sense where you can you know, I remember I cried when I saw Tim Gunn's, it's get better, It Gets Better video, like I just I would just like wept. And I was like Tim Gunn. So but, you know, as we were talking about it, he was like, Yeah, but what like, What about the kids that are really in it right now, like those teens that are really struggling? And you're saying like, Oh, yeah, you know, in 10 years after you go to college, it'll be fine. Well, it's like, well, no, things suck now. Things suck now, and just hearing someone else say, Yes, things suck now, and not it will get better later, or you will get help. Or you will this or you will, you know, like, just know things suck now and I'm with you. The project before it became the weather report, we called it things suck now.

CHAD

I think that it's so important to also acknowledge that our language around mental health has to change. We're talking about a campaign that's over a decade old at this point. And in the moment, it was good. But we don't need to, to hitch our wagon to good things when we can continue to do a little bit better. So let's, let's talk about the weather report that was developed in order to, to do a little bit better, push the ball forward, let's see where this conversation goes. So give us a quick boilerplate on the weather report.

DEANNA

It is a wee wee tiny tool. And I think the URL is get.theweathereport.org. I'll double check that. And it is just a little simple form that you can fill out that says this is what's going on right now. This is how I feel about what's going on right now. This is what I need right now. And this is what I don't need right now. So born out of that situation where the use case originally was a friend of a friend was going through divorce and was exhausted from having to tell everyone about the divorce, about how she's doing, get all kinds of unsolicited advice, hear all kinds of terrible things about her ex which she also didn't I think want to hear. Vu is the one that actually came up with this idea. Like, what if we could just like wouldn't it be great if you could just send somebody a link and be like, This is what's up and be really explicit about what your needs and what you're not needing right now, and then be able to share something maybe a little bit fun, like, we included this section that says, you know, what's getting me through right now. This piece of music is getting me through, rewatching all of Madmen is getting me through right now. You know, like whatever, whatever the thing was. So yeah, it's just this tiny little form. And then you have a little private link when you're done. And you can send that link to people or you can just keep it amongst yourselves. And we heard just really, really great responses from it. And again, I think this is like almost 10 years ago that we made this, but it's still up where people were using it in all kinds of use cases where there was a group of friends using it as their weekly check in. They all send each other, it was a group of five friends that all lived in different geographies. And so they use this tool just not even because anyone was in crisis, but just because like that was an easy way for them to check in with one another.

CHAD

Such a great story that feeds perfectly into the next point. That is suicide prevention. Weekly check ins with friends outside of the context of of 911 calls and 988 calls and in crisis. Suicide Prevention happens daily, hourly, minute by minute how we're practicing self care and how we are anticipating ways that we can care for for others. So in the spirit of that anticipation, you mentioned the necessity of putting preemptive systems into place with family or friends or whomever else you welcome into your story. What

are some practical ways that you have seen that you've implemented that, beyond the weather report, of ways that people can, can make plans ahead of time anticipating caring for others?

DEANNA

One that I used, this actually my best friend and I, we call each other, we're each other's heterosexual life partners. We're planning our retirement together, we've been through everything together. My best friend's Sins, she had a friend who passed away in the night, suddenly, and unexpectedly. And she ended up with a lot of anxiety about this. And in the weeks afterwards, because she realized she's like, I live alone. Like, how, how will someone know? Like, my cat is going to eat my face, I'm going to be one of those people like what's going to happen? And I was like, Oh, my God, wait, I live alone too, my dogs are going to eat my face, like what's going to happen? And we were just texting about it. And I was like, should we should we just check in with each other every day, like, just like, say, Good morning, and then like, like, have a plan. Like, if we don't hear from each other by like, a certain hour, then, you know, we do something about that. And, and so that's what we started doing. And I think we've been doing it for maybe 10 now, every single morning. We're both Gen X so we like Bitmojis. And we just send each other hilarious bitmoji every day, just to get started. And sometimes that's the only thing that ever happens is just it's such a hectic day. But I know that she didn't die in the night. I didn't die in the night. She knows that and whatever. And we have, you know, the emergency system. There was one point where I didn't hear back from her. I tried to call her by at the time where we had said like, Okay, if you don't hear from me, by this time, couldn't reach her. And then started reaching out to her little list of people that she said, Here, here's my order of, you know, people to call reached out to her co workers didn't hear back right away. So I was just about to call her upstairs neighbor to be like, go down and knock on her door. She's like, Oh, my God, I was in an early meeting, I forgot to text you. Everybody's in this meeting. I'm so sorry. So like, all the co workers that I would have typed, like, everybody was just in this meeting. And it was, you know, quarter to 12. And I was like, You're not dead. And so now we have a joke of like, if we're getting antsy, one of us will yell and all caps into the chat proof of life, I need proof of life please, you know, and that has done so much for my well being and feeling stable and feeling like yeah, I can continue to live on my own as long as I'm capable in all the different ways like this does really help me, it helps my mom's sleep at night because she knows that Sins, and I are checking in every morning and you know, it's just tiny things like that.

CHAD

The gift is beyond the Bitmojis, obviously, is the sense of consistency. Yeah, we mentioned in one of the earlier points of the importance of being able to check in, but those check ins really find their value if you're accustomed to checking in and yes, the best time to start checking in with friends and building this habit was 10 years ago. The second best time is now. Now is a perfect day 1 to say Hey friends, let's get a little bit weird and I promise it'll only be weird for the first couple of weeks. But let's get in the habit of checking in. Check in when it's a great day check in when it's a nothing day, check in when it's a bad day, it's all worth checking in on and yeah. That again is suicide prevention. That is grief maintenance.

DEANNA

You're absolutely right. I never thought about it. Yes, it is. Absolutely. It is absolutely grief maintenance, and it is care. And it is community.

CHAD

I just read a tweet today, it was a quote from poet Bell Hooks, and I'm gonna butcher the actual words, but the point was, in really identifying the value of independence, being wary of codependence, but being mindful that we are interdependent . Let these be different buckets. But you know, while while we want to make sure that you are not trapped in codependent relationships, be aware that we are interdependent that Deanna even just today, having never met you until an hour ago, you have so flavored this this

campaign that we're in for suicide prevention you flavored this day that I am interdependent on your wisdom on your empathy. Like, oh, my gosh, and, and again, you know, kind of going back to this sense of consistency, that consistency will give gravity to your questions of hey, you good? Are you okay? Yeah, something feels off. You are part of someone's checking in even just for a few moments, even just 30 seconds a day to start your day, saying, Hey, friend, I love you. I'm thinking of you. How can I prove my love to you? And maybe send me a Bitmoji? Or maybe they'll say, and I could really use a phone call at two o'clock today. Like, but yeah, I think that consistency is going to open the door to ways we can continue to care for each other and practice this interdependence.

DEANNA

And but it's so easy to go to kind of extreme extremes in our heads, you know, our brains are wired for binary thinking, basically, every decision that we make is a 0 or 1 of yes, no, this yes, no, this yes or no, this and it pushes us into very kind of like, like strata of this or this is the only way to do things. And it can be really fluid. You know, I sent a text to someone, I actually don't even know that well, but I just hadn't heard from in a long time. And we'd had some pretty deep conversations and was like, Hey, how are you doing? And she was like, oh, yeah, no, I'm really shitty. Things are real bad right now. You know, and we ended up on the phone and talking and, you know, whatever, whatever. So it's like, it can be getting into the practice of it yourself opens you up to receiving it. And then also opens up the potential for that consistency to really help you navigate it. I mean, if I send the Bitmoji with the person who's like under the covers, and just like their face is sticking out like like, this is very typical of me, you know, I'm just like, oh, I can't human today. Like she knows that means I can't human today and she's like you good? You need anything? Like no but just I'm not going to human. Yeah, it's, you can be generous with yourself and give yourself space to have some fluidity in it. It doesn't have to be hard and strict.

CHAD

Yeah. Where words fail Bitmojis can speak volumes.

DEANNA

Cute.

CHAD

Deanna this has been an absolute joy. I acknowledge how odd it is to say talking about suicide prevention can be can be joyous. But I do believe that the conversations we're having, it spans, you know, the entire breadth of human experience that, yeah, we can talk about the heavy while while endearing ourselves to the lighter parts, we can talk about the moments that that feel crushing adjacent to the moments where we just found a new hairdo for for a Bitmoji. I'm just, I'm just really, really filled with with the gratitude of your time and your wisdom.

DEANNA

I'm in gratitude for this podcast and creating the space for these conversations, because it does feel so difficult for a lot of people, and y'all are making space for this work to happen. And so that's super, super critical. And I think that, honestly, my whole take is I just often even in my most, most worst depressive episodes, I just feel like being a human is so absurd. Like, just the prospect of being a human is absurd. And adding more absurdity to it. It's like, Well, why not?

CHAD

No, absolutely with that, but turning the microphone solely over to you, Deanna, knowing that words like you are loved, and you'll get through this, and just sending you a cat picture hanging onto a branch saying

hang in there, ain't gonna get it done. What might you say to someone who who is struggling and listening right now?

DEANNA

Yeah. I go straight back to my friend Vu. And I say I am with you. Oh, I am with you so hard. It is so so hard right now. And I wish I could just wrap myself around it. The other thing I would say is, I have come to learn that the demons in your head are liars. They are filthy, stinking liars. And whatever it is that they are plaguing you with that is the chink that they happen to find in your armor and now the hordes of demons are flooding in. But you are still here, and you're listening to this, which means you've, you've still got something going on there. And I am here for that. And I think it's badass that you're even showing up. In this way, even if it's like you ever do that thing where it's like you're so tired, you're on the couch and can't reach the remote and so you just like don't even turn anything off or like you try to download an app for your phone because it's easier than trying to set up a remote? Like I'm with you so hard. And I'm gonna keep fighting like hell. And I hope that you'll stick around however best you can. Because this is it man.

[music playing]

CHAD: Deanna, we can't thank you enough for your presence. You brought humor, joy, authenticity, and absurdity to a conversation about a topic that's often shrouded by heaviness and shame. We are so grateful you exist and we are so grateful to have had the opportunity to listen to and connect with you. To you, our listeners, we hope this episode made you laugh or feel even a tad bit lighter. We hope you found the weird and wonderful courage to ask someone how they are really doing or to tell someone how you're really doing. Although the things you may be carrying are burdensome, they do not make you a burden. Remember that. And remember just how glad we are that you're here and that we get to go through this beautiful yet heartbreaking journey together.

[music playing]

CHAD: We hope this episode has been a reminder that your story is important, you matter, and you're not alone.

If you're struggling right now, know that it is OK to reach out and that there are people who want to help. Part of our mission is to connect people to the help they need and deserve. You can find local mental health resources on our website [twloha.com](https://www.twloha.com). That's [T-W-L-O-H-A.com](https://www.T-W-L-O-H-A.com). And Click FIND HELP at the top of the page.

If you're in the US or Canada and need to talk to someone right now, you can always text our friends at Crisis Text Line. Simply text the word TWLOHA—that's T W L O H A—to 741741. You'll be connected to a crisis counselor. It's free, confidential, and available 24/7.

For a list of crisis support resources for listeners living outside of the United States, please visit [twloha.com](https://www.twloha.com) and click on the International Resources tab.

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