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BREAKING THE SILENCE: TEEN SUICIDE

Mbalenhle Dlamini
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From 9 - 13 February, we observe Teen Suicide Prevention Week, a crucial time to raise awareness about the mental health challenges faced by young people. Alarming, studies indicate that 9% of students in South Africa have died by suicide, while 20% of learners have attempted suicide in the past decade. These statistics highlight the urgent need for intervention, education, and support.

Understanding Teen Mental Health

Teenagers' mental health struggles are often overlooked, sometimes due to misconceptions such as "they are too young to experience real stress" or "they have no major responsibilities, so what could they be worried about?" However, these assumptions are far from reality.

Adolescence is a critical developmental period marked by academic pressure, social expectations, family dynamics, and personal identity struggles. Many parents and caregivers may not fully recognize the intensity of these pressures, which can lead to feelings of isolation, hopelessness, and even suicidal thoughts.

Causes and Risk Factors

- Mental health disorders such as depression and anxiety
- Substance abuse
- Bullying and cyberbullying
- Physical, emotional, or sexual abuse
- Self-harm behaviors
- Past trauma
- Struggles with sexual orientation or gender identity
- Family conflicts or instability
- A family history of suicide

It is important to recognize that while teenagers may be seen as "the babies of the world," they can experience profound emotional pain and life-altering challenges. Many of the issues we face as adults begin in our youth, making it critical not to dismiss their struggles—no matter how big or small they may seem.

BREAKING THE SILENCE: TEEN SUICIDE

Recognizing the Warning Signs

Early detection of depression, self-harm, or suicidal ideation can save lives. Warning signs may include:

- Changes in eating or sleeping habits
- Loss of interest in usual activities
- Decline in academic performance
- Neglect of personal appearance and hygiene
- Withdrawal from friends and family
- Expressions of hopelessness or worthlessness
- Engaging in self-harm (e.g., cutting, pulling out hair)
- Talking about death or suicide, even in a seemingly casual manner

How We Can Help

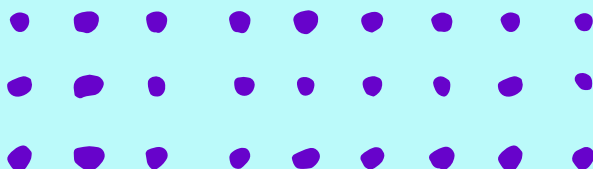
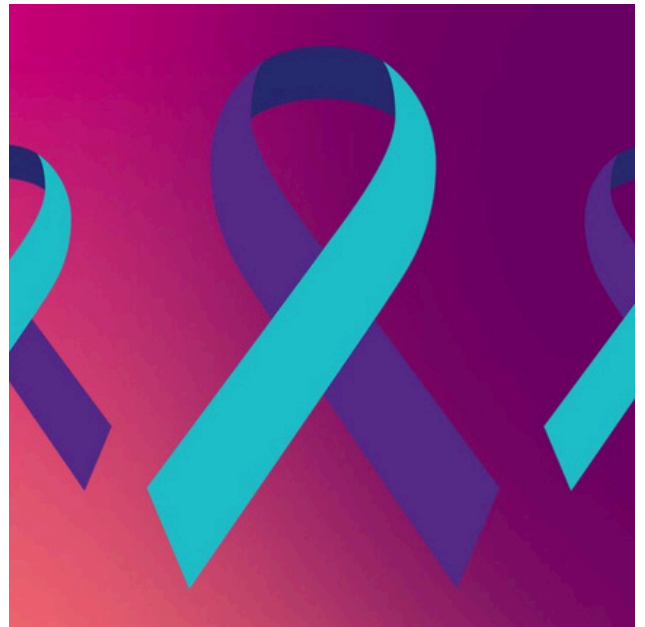
Preventing teen suicide requires a collective effort from parents, teachers, friends, and communities. Here's how we can make a difference:

- Listen without judgment. Create a safe space for teenagers to express their feelings.
- Encourage open conversations about mental health. Normalize discussions about emotions, struggles, and seeking help.
- Educate yourself on mental health and suicide prevention. Awareness leads to action.
- Seek professional help when needed. Therapy, counselling, and support groups can be life-changing.
- Foster supportive environments. Schools and communities should provide resources and promote kindness, inclusivity, and peer support.

Breaking the Silence

Let's work together to create a world where teenagers feel heard, valued, and supported. It is time to normalize conversations about suicide, break the stigma surrounding mental health, and ensure that no young person feels alone in their struggles.

If you or someone you know is struggling with suicidal thoughts, reach out for help. You are not alone, and there is hope.





Riding the *Wave* of Hope

How to Sustain
Optimism Through Life's
Ups and Downs in 2025

Kholofelo Mashaba

A new year often brings a renewed sense of hope and optimism. For many of us looking back on a challenging year, the promise of a fresh start is like a beacon for something better. But as the months roll on and life throws unexpected hurdles our way, that spark of hope can start to fade.

Maintaining a healthy sense of optimism isn't always easy, especially when facing setbacks or negative experiences. Yet, it's crucial to remind ourselves that things can - and often do - improve. As Edwin Alexander wisely stated in *UnPrisoned*, "**It will be alright in the end. If it ain't alright, that means it ain't the end**" (McMillan, 2024). This message reminds us that even when circumstances seem overwhelming, hope remains within reach.

What Is Healthy Optimism, Anyway?

So what do we mean by having a healthy sense of optimism? First, let's talk briefly about what optimism actually is. Optimism can be thought of as a positive style of thinking or mental attitude that's all about maintaining a hopeful outlook on the future, the world, and ourselves. It's that mindset that says, 'You know what? Things are going to be okay' (Vos et al., 2021).

When we have a healthy sense of optimism, it's more than just wishful thinking: it's a realistic and balanced outlook on life that allows us, for example, to acknowledge and navigate possibly challenging times while maintaining positive expectations for the future (Almansa et al., 2022). Instead of expecting everything to be okay all the time (especially when it's clearly not), a healthy sense of optimism helps you ride that wave rather than letting it crash into you and wipe you out. And even if it does crash into you, you can always get back up, catch your breath, and keep going.

Why Embrace Optimism?

Adopting a positive mental attitude can have a profound impact on our overall wellbeing: mental, emotional, and even physical (Vos et al., 2021). In challenging times, optimism acts as a protective factor by enhancing our coping strategies and fostering resilience, which is crucial when life throws us curveballs (Vos et al., 2021). By promoting effective mental strategies, optimism helps us manage stress and boosts our self-confidence during tough moments (Arslan et al., 2020). This resilience, in turn, serves as a buffer against the negative effects of stress on our mental health (Vos et al., 2021).

Moreover, research indicates that optimistic individuals are more likely to engage in health-promoting behaviors such as exercising regularly, maintaining a balanced diet, and steering clear of risky habits (Yue et al., 2022). Optimism also encourages a goal-oriented mindset, helping us pursue and achieve the resolutions and aspirations we set at the beginning of the year (Almansa et al., 2022).

In short, optimism offers far-reaching benefits that provide a sturdy foundation as we navigate the ups and downs of the year ahead. If you find yourself feeling overwhelmed or exhausted by life's demands, cultivating a positive mental attitude can be the key to moving forward with resilience and hope.

Keeping the Spark Alive

As the initial excitement of the new year subsides and our busy lives take over, those early hopes can seem distant. If you find yourself feeling overwhelmed or disheartened by setbacks, here are some practical strategies to help keep your optimism alive (Scott, 2022):

- **Practice Self-Compassion:** Yes! Be kinder to yourself this year. When you go through a difficult time, acknowledge that setbacks are a normal part of life and that you can overcome them.
- **Highlight the Positives:** Make a habit of jotting down positive experiences and emotions. Acknowledging the good things, even the small wins, can reinforce a more positive outlook.
- **Reflect and Learn:** Make the time to reflect and learn from any setbacks or negative experiences. Remember that failure is just another opportunity to learn and to grow. Reflecting on what you can improve helps build resilience.
- **Let Go of What You Can't Control:** This one can be very challenging, but dwelling on the things we cannot control may leave us feeling helpless and frustrated. To maintain your optimism, acknowledge what you can and cannot control.

This year doesn't have to feel like just another series of challenges. By cultivating healthy optimism, you can embrace each twist and turn with resilience and gratitude, appreciating the journey rather than constantly looking ahead to the next new year.

The Power of Vulnerability: Why Authenticity Builds Lasting Connections

By Tshoanelo Kilowan



In relationships, we often strive to present the best versions of ourselves. While this is usually well-meaning, it can lead us to hide aspects of our true selves out of fear of being judged or misunderstood. However, genuine connection is rooted in authenticity and vulnerability—the courage to reveal who we truly are. When we allow ourselves to be seen, we create the foundation for deeper intimacy and stronger relationships.

Why Vulnerability Matters.

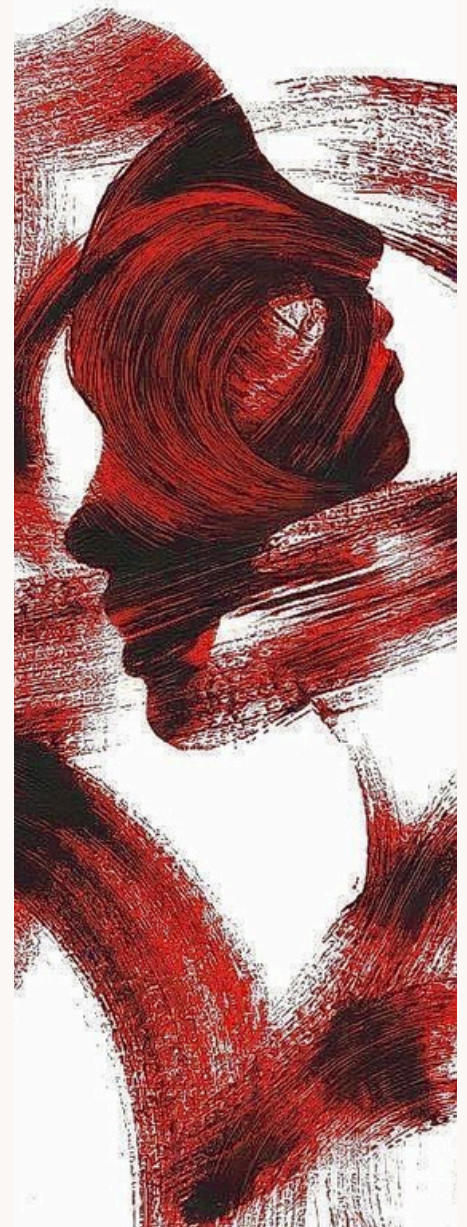
Maslow's hierarchy of needs highlights the critical importance of love and belonging in psychological growth. According to Bakshi and Ansari (2022), meaningful connections fulfill a fundamental human drive, bringing purpose and fostering emotional development. In the pursuit of love, vulnerability plays a central role in creating emotional freedom and strengthening intimacy between couples. By sharing their inner worlds, individuals invite their partners to see and accept them for who they truly are.



Vulnerability involves openly sharing thoughts, feelings, and experiences with a partner—exposing oneself to the possibility of hurt or rejection, but also the potential for deeper trust and connection. It is a conscious choice to be authentic and open, even in moments of uncertainty. Bakshi and Ansari (2022) emphasize that stepping into uncertainty and sharing openly can foster trust and emotional resilience in relationships. Yet, this level of openness can only be achieved through honesty and a willingness to express one's full identity.

Barriers to vulnerability often stem from inauthenticity, a lack of autonomy, and insufficient relationship education. Bakshi and Ansari (2022) note that societal and internal pressures frequently lead people to fear being truly seen, known, and heard. As a result, many individuals shy away from sharing their true selves and life experiences, limiting the depth of their relationships.

Many mistakenly equate vulnerability with weakness. However, research has consistently shown that self-disclosure—the act of revealing personal thoughts and feelings—is a powerful tool for fostering emotional intimacy and satisfaction in relationships (Collin & Miller, 1994; Prager et al., 2013). When couples engage in self-disclosure, they pave the way for greater connection and understanding



Two-way conversations are essential for effective communication in relationships. Research by Prager et al. (2013) suggests that these conversations allow one partner to express their thoughts while the other demonstrates presence and engagement through active listening. This dynamic fosters trust and belonging, leading both partners to feel heard, loved, supported, understood, and validated. Active listening and empathy are essential for creating a safe space where vulnerability can thrive.

Vulnerability is not a sign of weakness but rather a powerful tool for building deeper, more meaningful connections in romantic relationships. Embracing vulnerability allows couples to cultivate trust, empathy, and emotional intimacy, creating a safe space where both partners feel seen and valued. As Bakshi and Ansari (2022) emphasize, stepping into uncertainty and sharing one's authentic self promotes emotional freedom and resilience. In a world that often promotes perfection and inauthenticity, choosing vulnerability can transform relationships, helping them thrive in the face of challenges. Ultimately, vulnerability paves the way for relationships built on genuine connection, trust, and lasting love.



2025 VOLUNTEER TRAINING

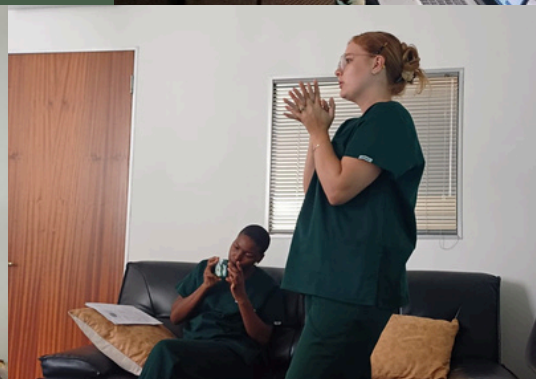
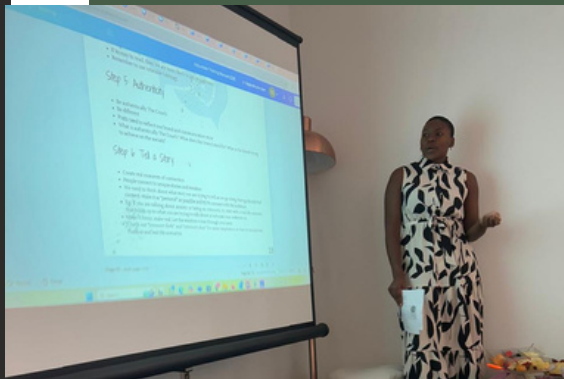
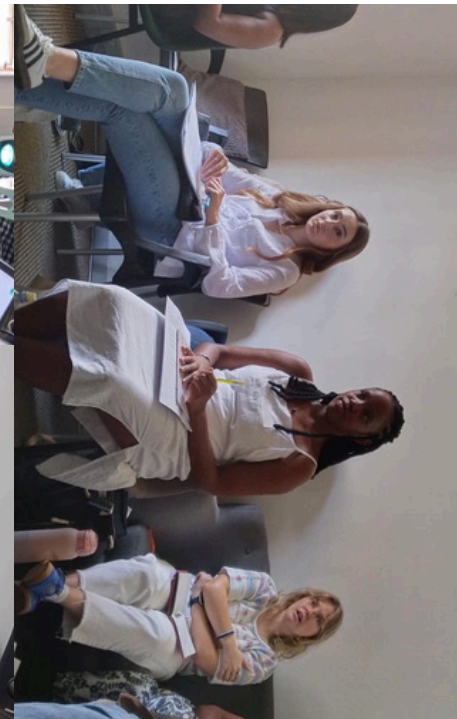


The Couch Volunteer Programme

For 10 months our volunteers help the practice with a range of tasks and activities such as:

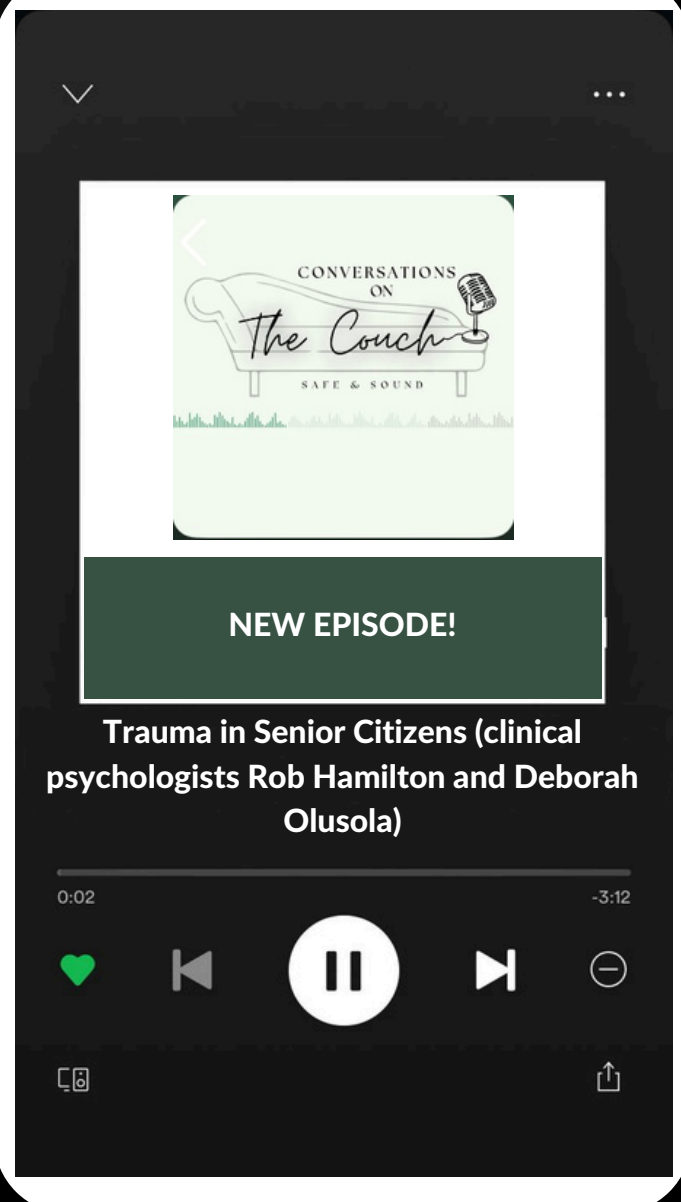
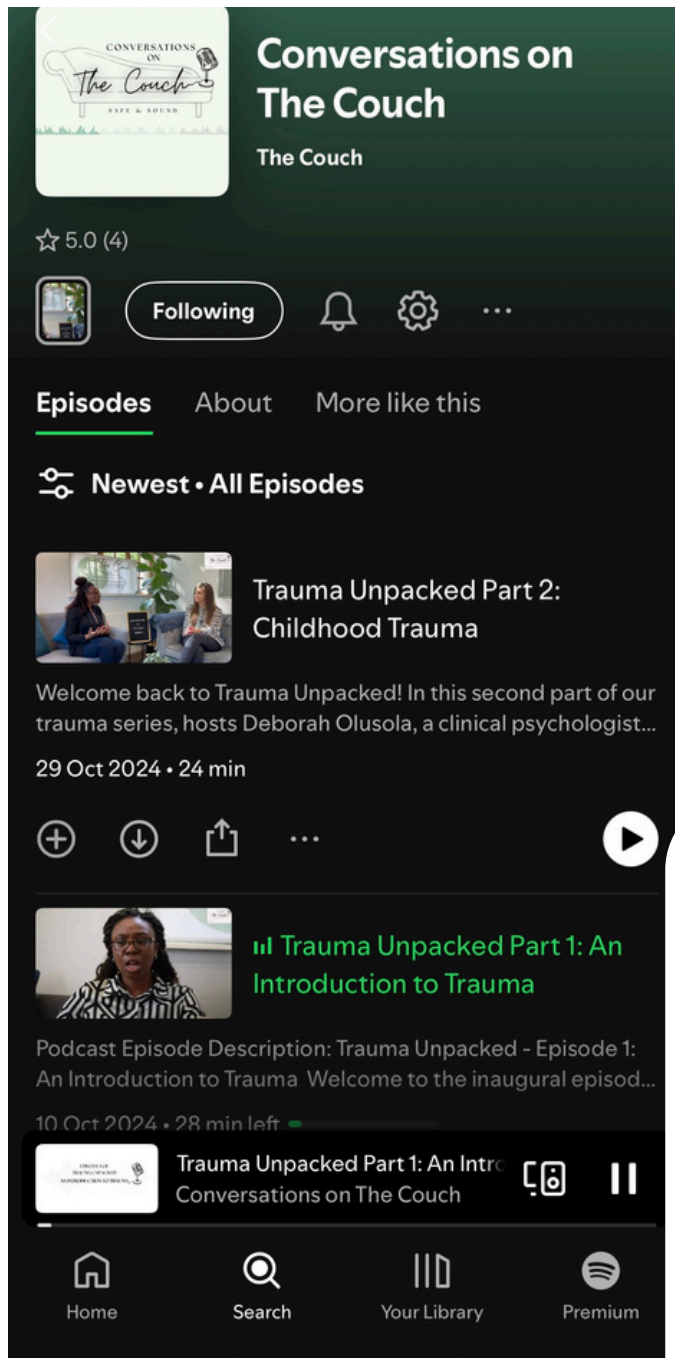
- Creating psychoeducational content for our social media pages
- Organising community and fundraising initiatives
- Providing in-person assistance with administrative tasks on a weekly basis.

This month, we held the 2025 Volunteer Training Programme. The volunteers started off with an icebreaker activity before they began their training. They were introduced to the practice and received tips on how to create content and newsletters, and how to work in reception with appropriate telephone etiquette.



Update your
2025 playlist.

TUNE INTO
CONVERSATIONS
on
The Couch



Thank you for being a part of our Couch Community. Stay tuned for our next newsletter - the March 2025 edition of the Psychology Couch Newsletter.

Until next time, as always, our wish for you is to heal, learn, and grow.

Get involved and stay in touch via our social media platforms:

 @the_psychology_couch	 @The Psychology Couch	 The Couch	 @The Couch (Practice of Psychology and Psychiatry)
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