

“SUICIDE: IT’S TIME WE TALKED”

By
ALAN HOPGOOD



Photo: pixabay.com

// WHO WE ARE



Parent Guides
// Eileen Berry



Playwright
// Alan Hopgood



PARENT GUIDES



HealthPlay and *Parent Guides* would like to thank Kirsten Cleland (Centre Manager – headspace Primary Platform) headspace Elsternwick & headspace Bentleigh) for reading, editing, endorsing and supporting this play.

// WHAT WE DO

- Target audience parents, carers, educators and health professionals working with teenagers: we want parents — especially — to take “ownership through education”
- Delivered in a safe environment, i.e. community libraries/theatres/schools
- Delivered in an art form that has “light and shade”: understanding the impact of mental health on families is not to be underestimated
- Backed up with a hard copy 36-page educational resource: not a pdf

// HOW TO BOOK YOUR THEATRE EVENT

Gay Hopgood // 0418 592 342 // gay.hopgood@gmail.com // healthplay.com.au

// YOUR AGENDA FOR THE NIGHT

The narrator in the play could be one of your own.

6.45 // Tea, Coffee, Biscuits provided

7.15pm // Welcome by Parenting Guides Ltd (PG) founder Eileen Berry and introduce play collaborators (headspace, Popsy and HealthPlay)

7.29pm // Phones off

7.30pm // Quiet please

'Suicide: It's Time We Talked' is a 35-minute HealthPlay written by well-known playwright Alan Hopgood AM.

8.15pm // Q&A with audience (parents, carers and educators with their teenager charges) by headspace (clinician) and PoPsy (positive psychology).

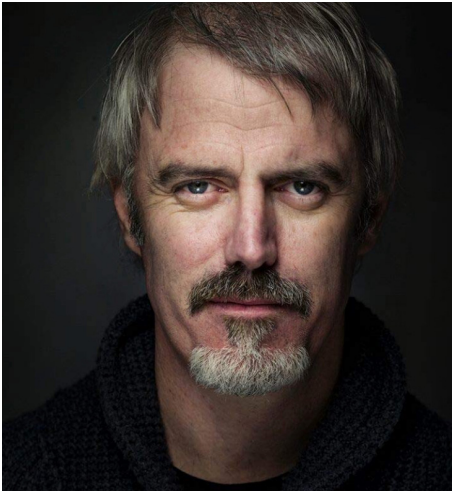
8.45pm // Every family leaves with a hard copy of PG resource Mental Health 101 (includes 2 pages of assistance's).

COST // \$7000 (+ GST)

// THE CAST



THE DAUGHTER // JESSICA MARTIN



THE FATHER // LEE MASON



THE MOTHER // MARCELLA RUSSO

**PICK MY
PROJECT**

This play was awarded a state government grant from the Department of Premier and Cabinet and will be performed at the Sacred Heart College Geelong, on Friday 29 March 2019 @ 6.30pm. Tickets will be available through Eventbrite closer to the date.

“SUICIDE: IT’S TIME WE TALKED”

(MUSIC)

(CHEL and LEE move to the music stands and turn their backs to the audience)

VOICES We’re gonna do it tonight?....together?...you in?
Don’t let me down.....

(the HOST steps forward)

HOST I have often been asked to write a play about suicide but political correctness has stifled me. You’re not supposed to discuss it.
You’re not supposed to say how you do it for fear of copycats.
You’re not supposed to say ‘commit suicide’ as that suggests a criminal offence
So how do you write about it?
But whatever we do, we must find a way to talk about it.

(if a student takes the role of host the text should be amended as follows;)

STUDENT Alan Hopgood, who wrote this play, was often asked to write a play about suicide
HOST but political correctness has stifled me. You’re not supposed to discuss it.
You’re not supposed to say how you do it for fear of copycats.
You’re not supposed to say ‘commit suicide’ as that suggests a criminal offence
So how do you write about it?
But whatever we do, we must find a way to talk about it.

(the other host speeches remain as they are)

(MUSIC)

(MUM and DAD sit at a kitchen table)

DAD Where’s Jess?

MUM In her room.

DAD Well, is she coming down for dinner? You know I like to eat as a family.

MUM I called her.

DAD Well, hadn’t you better call her again?

MUM Why don’t you go up and get her?

DAD Alright, I will.

(calls) Jess!

(and again) Jess!

No answer. Her door’s shut. But she’s there. Her light’s on.

MUM Well, she’s had a lot of homework lately. She spends a lot of time in her room.

DAD Well, you’d better go in and get her.

MUM Why don’t you go in?

DAD It’s her room.

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- MUM Exactly. Her domain. Why don't we just sit and eat? She'll be down when she's ready.
- DAD I'm not happy.
- MUM What's wrong? Sit down and eat.
- DAD Couple of blokes at work were asking. How's that kid of yours? I said, she's fine. Why? He said, there's something going on at that school. Do you know there's been suicides there?
- MUM Oh, come on. Jess is not like that. Though I must admit, she has been a bit distant lately. But I just put that down to too much work.
- DAD Well, they reckon three of the kids have topped themselves. One of them was called Lindy. Now, that name's familiar. Isn't she a friend of our Jess? Came here once for a sleepover.
- MUM Yes, she does have a friend called Lindy. If that's true, she'd be so upset she'd tell me. But look, if you're that worried, knock on her door and go in.
- DAD *(going)*
Alright. I will.
- MUM Best of luck!
(DAD goes then hurries back)
- DAD She's not there!
- MUM What?
- DAD She's gone! The window's open!
- MUM *(going)*
How'd she get down from her window?
- DAD Easy. One foot on the spout, the other the garage wall.
- MUM *(rushing out)*
Oh, my God! I always thought that was one place she was safe. I'll call the police!
- DAD While Mum called the police I went back into Jess' room. Her computer was still on. That was a bad sign. She usually turned it off. It said to me, she wasn't intending to come back. Other times, if I knocked and went in, she'd hit a button and the screen would go blank. But this time, I could read what was still on the screen. I printed it off....
(reads)
"I feel so empty and lost. I don't want to be here any more."

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DAD (reads)

"I better go jump – you poor, dumb, slut, shit, retarded– that's what the voices are telling me in my head every day..."

(MUM comes back)

MUM The police don't have anything. Too early. Nothing to go on. I just said – she's jumped out the window and...what else can I say? But they asked me to describe her....I've never had to do that. I said, she's blonde....
What's that?

(MUM takes the print-out from him and reads)

DAD It's off her computer.

MUM (grabs it and reads)

"I have nightmares. I have voices telling me I'm not good enough to be in this world." Oh, God....
"You're the reason I want to end this life."
Let's get in the car.

DAD And go where?

MUM I don't know! Anywhere!

I don't understand. I thought we were close. I always said, "Jess, if ever you feel low " – we used to talk about everything.

DAD Where are we going?

MUM I don't know. But we've got to do something! I don't know where she'd go! I don't know who her friends are any more. I used to know. But lately she's become a different person. But I can't just sit around here waiting for the police to ring back!

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DAD (waves the print-out)

I blame the bloody internet. It's created a world where kids can live completely out of reach of us adults.

MUM Okay, okay, but let's talk about it in the car....

(JESSICA enters. For a moment they stand looking at each other. The MUM and DAD hurry to give her a hug but she avoids them)

MUM Jess!
You're safe.

DAD (But DAD blocks her way)
Jess! Where the hell have you been?

JESSICA *(tries to walk past)*
I went for a walk.

DAD A walk! You don't jump out your window to go for a walk!

MUM We've rung the police! We didn't know where you were!

JESSICA **Can we talk about it in the morning?**

DAD We'll talk about it now!

(DAD stops her)

MUM Jess, we didn't know where you were. We thought....

JESSICA **Mum, leave it! We'll talk about it tomorrow;**

DAD No, we'll talk about it now!

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(DAD blocks her exit, but she stands there mute)

DAD *(cont)*

(waves the print-out)

This! This was on your computer.

JESSICA **You looked at my computer!**

DAD It was open for the world to see!

"I don't want to be here any more" That could have been your last message!

This and the open window. What were we supposed to think?

JESSICA **You wouldn't understand.**

DAD Well, try us!

MUM All we want is for you to tell us. How can we help you if you don't talk to us. How can we understand what's going on in that pretty little head of yours...

(MUM goes to touch JESSICA but she recoils)

JESSICA **Don't...touch...**

MUM We thought we were going to lose you.

(indicates print-out)

All this that you wrote – we didn't know any of it. It's like you've become a different person.....someone I don't know any more.

JESSICA **I have problems...**

DAD Yes, exactly. But we shouldn't have to read about your problems on a bloody computer!

MUM Dad!

JESSICA **I went to see some friends....**

DAD Right?

JESSICA **Then...I left them ...and...**

MUM And?

JESSICA **I went down....**

DAD Down to where?

JESSICA **To the tracks.**

MUM What tracks?

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JESSICA Just the tracks.

DAD What tracks!!

JESSICA The railway tracks...where the others had been going...

DAD To do what?

JESSICA *(after a pause)* What do you think?

(MUM and DAD are stunned)

But...but I changed my mind...now I just want to go to bed.....

(JESSICA goes to leave)

MUM Jess.....Is that what Lindy did?

JESSICA *(stops)*

Lindy?.....

(Then stifling tears, she hurries off)

MUM I'll come with you.

(DAD is left trying to absorb what's happened)

DAD I don't get it, The bloody internet.

I want to talk to my daughter. And I want her to talk to me.

Otherwise, why am I here? If she can't talk to me, what am I as a father?

If she can't talk me, I'm the failure, not her.

What does it make us as parents?

(MUSIC)

(Then JESSICA re-appears, and sits at her computer)

JESSICA There was a girl at school. She'd wait for me. She'd bully me. As soon as I got in the gate. After school I'd hurry to get home. Once I was in my house and my bedroom, I was safe.

But now she can follow me, into my bedroom, into my bed and during the night - no-one can come between me and the bully. Silently, in the middle of the night, when there's no-one to help you, the bully is there.

(calls as if answering someone)

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JESSICA (cont)

I didn't know I was unhappy

until you told me

I didn't know there was anything wrong with me

until you told me

I didn't know I was ugly

until you told me

I didn't know I should kill myself

Until you told me

I know how it feels to cry in the shower so no-one hears me. And wait for everyone to go to sleep so I can fall apart. And for everything to hurt so bad, you just want it to end.

(Jess remains. Voices off. JESSICA listens as if the voices are in her head)

VOICE 1 "Everybody knows you're going to the school psychologist."

VOICE 2 "You go out of class."

VOICE 1 "Where are you going – oh – have you got a problem?"

"What's that on your arms?"

VOICE 2 "The cat scratched me."

VOICE 1 "They're not cat scratches. I think we'd better go and see someone."

VOICE 2 "I'm not talking to anyone."

VOICE 1 "Yes, you are...and wear a long sleeved shirt, unless you want people to see ...or maybe you do.....do you?"

VOICES We're gonna do it tonight....together...you in? don't let me down....

(JESSICA leaves)

(MUSIC)

(DAD and MUM appear)

DAD How's she been?

MUM I let her take the day off. She slept till lunch time.

DAD Where is she now?

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MUM She went out.
DAD What?
MUM We can't keep her prisoner.
DAD I asked around at work out those suicides. The blokes knew more about it than me. Which felt great, I must admit, since our Jess was nearly one of them. Did you know there's been what they call a cluster?
Five have done it. You know?
MUM I know. I rang Fiona, Lindy's mother, today.
DAD Apparently, they arranged it all on Snapchat. What did she say?
Did the school know about it?
MUM Of course.
DAD Then why didn't they tell us? Why weren't we warned about it?
MUM Because the school didn't want copycats.
DAD Well, that's what they got – copycats! And Jess was nearly one of them. What else did she say? Why didn't she warn you?
MUM She said, "I felt guilty that I hadn't been able to stop her. I felt ashamed. There is such a stigma about it. The loss was bad enough without having to cope with the accusations."

(JESSICA enters and sits before her MUM and DAD)

DAD You okay?
JESSICA **Yes.**
DAD If you'd succeeded in what you were going to do...last night...Didn't you think of the pain you'd cause your Mum and me?
JESSICA **No.**
DAD Didn't you think about your friends at school?
JESSICA **No.**
DAD Didn't you realise you'd be throwing away probably 50 years of life?
JESSICA **Yes. Fifty years I didn't want.**
MUM I spoke with Lindy's Mum.
She told me about the cluster.
Is that what you were wanting to be – part of that.
JESSICA **There were other things.**

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DAD Like what?

JESSICA **Just things.**

DAD Maybe you'll get around to telling us...things.
So, why didn't you do it?

MUM Dad!

DAD (to MUM)

She must have some reason.

JESSICA (eventually)

Cold.....I hate cold.... Those tracks looked so cold and black I lay down on the tracks...so cold, so hard... I started to shiver and I knew if I died it would be even colderwhatever place I wanted to get to, I knew I'd have to go through a very hard, cold place to get there...and I wasn't ready. I heard the train whistle in the distance...it was leaving the last station.....I just couldn't... seconds ticking...my heart beating....would it soon...stop beating....I stood up....just as the train went past....I'll never forget the sound of that train....

(MUM goes to JESSICA and puts her arms around her.)

JESSICA **You're so warm.....so warm.....**

(MUSIC)

(the HOST appears)

HOST The following quotes were taken from a television programme about messages young people have received on the internet. Please note their age.

(VOICES at the music stands)

VOICE 2 **"Hey, buddy. Saw your post and I must say that was fucking pathetic, mate. Suck it up princess and stop whining about losing your grandfather. If you want to see your granddad again, there's one thing you can do."**

HOST Received by Samuel, aged 13, just after losing his grandfather.

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- VOICE 1 "You're an ugly fat bitch. Your dad probably killed himself because he couldn't stand looking at you."
- HOST Received by Carly, aged 16.
- VOICE 1 "No-one actually likes you. You should kill yourself so we don't have to pretend any more."
- HOST Received by Jayden, aged 14.
- VOICE 2 "You don't know what's coming. You're going to be six feet under with a slit throat. Keep doing what you're doing."**
- HOST Received by Cathy, aged 12.
- VOICE 1 "I know you want to kill yourself and especially because of your anxiety. What bullshit mate."
- HOST Received by Phillip, aged 13.
- VOICE 2 "You have to stop dancing. You're embarrassing yourself. Give up already. You're a slack dancer, Sorry, it's the truth."**
- HOST Received by Melissa aged 10.
- HOST Makes you sad that people want to write that stuff. Especially when they're so young. I don't understand the cruelty. Bullies see it as a joke but they forget that that digital footprint stays till the day you die.
In Australia in 2015, 405 suicides were recorded by young people ages 15 to 24 years. So, let's try to understand what it is and talk about it.

(MUSIC)

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(DAD and MUM return)

DAD How's she going?

MUM Much better.

DAD I just couldn't get those bloody tracks out of my brain. So I had a chat with the blokes at work today. We're chatting a bit more these days. Not just the footy. But kids. Our kids. Usually, when we see things going wrong we say – "kids – what can we do." But now we're gonna try.

Who cares if they laugh in our face – "what would you know Dad?" But better we try. Some guys say "don't talk about the bloody cluster – you're only putting ideas in their head" But it doesn't work like that. The best way to help a kid who is suicidal is to ask.

"Are you feeling so bad you're thinking about killing yourself?"

MUM What if they say "yes"?

DAD Don't say – "that's crazy. You're not going to kill yourself. You're just trying to get attention. Let's talk about it. What's making you feel so bad you're even thinking that way?"

MUM The blokes at work were saying this?

DAD When things get serious, we get serious. We all promised we'd go home and talk to the kids. Might not work. But we'll all have a go.

(JESSICA enters)

MUM Hi.

DAD Jess...

MUM You okay?

JESSICA **Sure.**

DAD Mum and me were having a bit of a chat about how we can help you after what happened recently.

JESSICA **Sure. Can I go to the loo first?**

DAD Yeah, but the main thing – if ever you have a problem. Wake us. Any time.

JESSICA **Wake you up?**

DAD And get that computer out your bedroom!

JESSICA **I have to do my homework and I can't do that with the TV blaring!**

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DAD I'll turn it down.

MUM You'll turn it off!

JESSICA **Now can I go to the loo?**

DAD Oh, sure, Right.

(JESSICA goes)

MUM That was a good start.

DAD Brings you down to earth...Well.....

MUM How was your day apart from your men's summit meeting.

DAD Yeah, good. They keep coming up with good ideas, like – "tell your kid, he can top himself tomorrow. He has things to do today. The world needs you, even you if don't need it."

MUM Good. I've chatted to several mothers and they're all going to try and open up the subject. Not just sweep it under the carpet. Give the taboo the boot.

DAD I like that. Taboot!

MUM And even if we feel a bit foolish, that's a small price to pay if we keep our kids alive.

DAD But what about Lindy's mum. Her daughter's gone. There's no tomorrow for her to talk about.

MUM We need to take care of her. Some people never recover from a suicide. It devastates so many people.

(JESSICA returns)

JESSICA **Sorry about that.**

DAD There are no toilets in Heaven. Sorry. Bad taste
(suddenly goes) My turn!

(There is an awkward silence that descends)

MUM You okay?

(JESSICA doesn't answer)

It wasn't just Lindy, was it?

(pause)

Your friends haven't been around for a while. Is everything alright with them?

(pause)

Has something happened?

JESSICA **Hard to talk about it.**

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MUM I remember... when I was at school... there was this girl....
(JESSICA slowly looks up. More is said in the silences)
Didn't know much about her....
But she knew everything about me...
Kids can be so cruel....
I know what you're going through....
We've all been through it.
You're not alone.

(DAD comes in, stops and witnesses the bond between mother and daughter)

JESSICA **I did love Lindy. I just wanted to be with her whatever she did. I know...who knows where we'd be or if we'd be anywhere. But you don't think about those things. It takes the cold of the tracks to wake you up.**

(JESSICA gets up. She kisses each of them on the cheek)

JESSICA **Thanks, Mum,
Thanks, Dad.**

(MUM and DAD stay at the table as JESSICA steps forward)

JESSICA **Lindy, you were the best person on earth. I'm going to miss you so much. Do you know you have 600 Snapchat friends? I told everybody I was your closest friend, but Sally said she was. And Mandy said, no, no, no, she was. But it doesn't matter because I know I was. I just didn't do it the other night I was going to. I really wanted to go to be with you but the boys stopped me. But even before they found me, I wasn't going to anyway. Not when it came to it. I'm sorry but I just couldn't do it and now, I don't think I could try it again because....I dunno...I woke up next morning and I thought....I'm glad I woke.**

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JESSICA (cont)
Up...when I nearly didn't wake up. And I looked out the window at the sky and the sun and I was suddenly happy I didn't do it. But I still love you and life is still bad in some ways, but I wonder if you'd just waited a bit longer whether you'd also feel the way I do.

(MUSIC)

(MUM and DAD join JESSICA for the curtain call which ushers in the Q and A)

THE END

