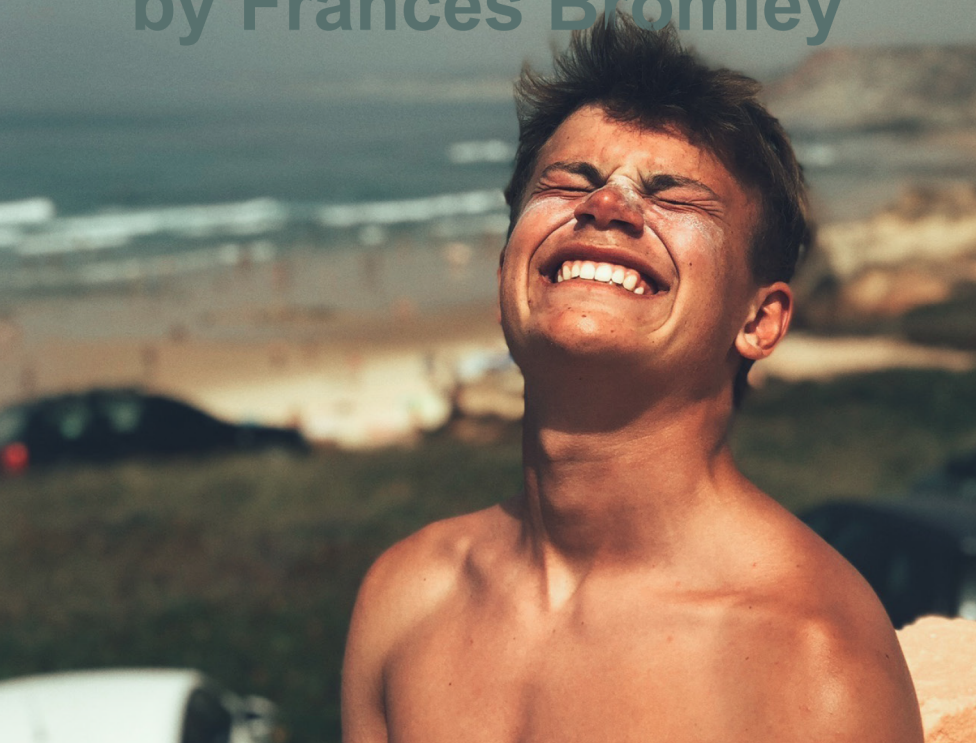


B.E.C.K.

The Power of a Smile

by Frances Bromley



Learn how to support your mental health and wellbeing
with ACTIVE LISTENING and a safety plan

photo by Hannah Bromley

B.E.C.K.

The Power of a Smile

Learn how to support your
mental health and wellbeing
with
ACTIVE LISTENING
and a safety plan

I debated whether or not to put Beck's smile on the cover of this book, but as a close friend said to me:

'After being in beautiful places with beautiful sunsets for months, I can still say that there's nothing more beautiful than a smile.'

Ok, so I may be just a little bit biased, but I think my son's smile is up there amongst the best!



B.E.C.K. The Power of a Smile, is a compassionate and practical guide to the universal life skills of active listening and safety planning. Drawing on her research and lived experience of two traumatic deaths, Frances Bromley explores how grief moves through communities. With clarity and care, she develops her belief that suicide is preventable, and shares tools for mental health and wellbeing. This book offers hope, and invites readers to take meaningful action to protect themselves and one another, showing how connection helps to strengthen society.

"I'd like to thank Frances for writing such an amazing little book. I have shared the information a number of times with people in need. It is personally and succinctly written, with links that are easy to access."

Sarah Rose, Counsellor MBACP Accred

June 2026

About the author

Frances Bromley (born Frances Hughes in 1969) is an English creative. She studied Industrial Design to degree level followed by developing the newly emerging technologies in artificial intelligence. The birth of her first child with Dominic Bromley, saw a transition from hexadecimal programming to designing Sindy™ accessories for toy giant Hasbro. Her corporate career progressed to becoming the Creative Director for the Licensing Division of Fremantle (a major TV and film production group). The birth of their second child saw a move to Staffordshire, and to working alongside her husband in his art and design studio, Scabetti. The couple now have three children and together they continue to create art installations on an inspiring scale.

In 2021 and 2022 family life was shattered by two traumatic deaths. This book, along with Frances' creative approach to life, is her collection of thoughts and learning about grief, and of how communities might be better prepared for complex life events.

B.E.C.K. The Power of a Smile
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© 2022 Beck Bromley
(the smile Beck drew as part of his signature)

Frances Bromley asserts the moral right to be identified as the author of this work.
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These laws fuel creativity and inspire and support all those that work hard to bring books to life.

Photograph of Beck by Hannah Bertola (Bromley)
Illustrations and design layout by Frances Bromley

www.beckbromley.com

Human authored and edited using lived experience and referenced research.
Resources and references correct to the best of the author's knowledge at the time of writing.
If there are any inadvertent omissions or errors in this book, given direct notice, the author and publisher will be pleased to correct at their earliest opportunity.
This book should not be used as a substitute for the advice of a health professional.
It is a personal reflection on the impact of grief and profound loss.
It has been written and offered as an expression of a desire to help others.

My thanks

I do not have the space or capacity to list all my sources of inspiration here, but they include the support from so many friends and strangers, music, silence, sport, relaxation, books, art and all the beauty in nature. A poem from my sister offered a reminder to always look for the silver threads in life... however fine they are; there is always something to be found that glimmers.

I would, however, like to offer special thanks:

To Dom, Hannah, Ava and Toby for their patience, and for listening to my need to empower others with what I have learned.

To my son Beck, for the wisdom of a mother's hindsight, which you gave to me by allowing me into your world when you felt suicidal, and for the joy you still help me to experience every day.

To you, reading this now, for allowing Beck's smile into your life, and for allowing me to hope that *B.E.C.K.* might help you find your own reason to stay should you ever need it.

Thank you all,

Fran.

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Smiling is Infectious

Help and Support

I have just watched a powerful drama on Channel 4. It brought harsh memories to mind that I was not prepared for, or perhaps wanting to address. I was surprised that I had not noticed any content warning before or after the broadcast, but then discovered the comprehensive list of resources that Channel 4 offers on their website under help and support. Many other news and entertainment platforms do the same; Netflix directs viewers to *wannatalkaboutit.com* and the BBC keep their *actionline* updated.

I do not know what might trigger you as you read this book. Channel 4, Netflix and the BBC say they regularly review their A-Z listings, so if you have access to the internet, these seem like good websites to recommend. If you worry that the subjects of suicide, mental distress and grief might upset you, then I hope that this book will highlight opportunities for post-traumatic growth, and a way to look for joy, purpose and passion in life.

I personally want to raise awareness of the following services because they are currently available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, including bank holidays. I offer three because if one does not answer or work for me, I will try another. If you are not in the UK at the moment, please consider local services.

Phone Samaritans on 116 123 *www.samaritans.org*

Text SHOUT to 85258 *www.giveusashout.org*

Call Hopeline 0800 068 41 41 *www.papyrus-uk.org*

Papyrus also offer a 24/7 British Sign Language translation service.

24 Hours, 7 days a week:

Phone Samaritans on 116 123 www.samaritans.org

Text SHOUT to 85258 www.giveusashout.org

Call Hopeline 0800 068 41 41 www.papyrus-uk.org

Papyrus also offer a 24/7 British Sign Language
translation service.

www.channel4.com/4viewers/help-support

www.wannatalkaboutit.com

www.bbc.co.uk/actionline

Introduction

*Statistics say that 1 in 4 of us have had thoughts of suicide at some point in our lives.

In December 2021, I sat beside my father in a care home as he took his last breath. Alzheimer's (vascular dementia) had changed how he was able to communicate with those around him. In November 2022, our 19-year-old son, Beck, killed himself. We will never know his reasons. I have fabricated my own theory, and his father, sisters, friends and community may also often challenge themselves with the whys, hows and what-ifs in their darker moments of self-doubt. I have since experienced the crushing emotion of not understanding the purpose of life, and the belief that my family, friends and community would be better off without me.

Know that anyone can have thoughts that make them suicidal or want to harm themselves or others.

All I really want to do is invent a Time Machine, but for now, I have chosen to figure out other ways to survive and master my pain of loss that is so excruciatingly new to me. I want to share some of what I have learned about grief so far and what I hope might help others in the future.

I first came up with an acronym for our son's name while walking in our local park, early in the morning, in the run up to the first anniversary of his death. I had resolved not to let the month beat me, as I had been warned it might. I found myself in deep despair, but also being held by the unexpected joys that nature presented. I posted these on instagram each day, trying to find those silver threads of joy where I could, and to catalogue these

small moments so that I could return to them. I was also searching for a way to guide Beck's community, hence the creation of a meaning for the letters in his name.

The book B.E.C.K. then followed, printed in time for Beck's birthday, the following June.

I had experienced the wide reaching effect of our son's suicide and I wanted to try and offer a process that might help his community to survive, maybe even thrive, through the impact that Beck's death may have had on their lives. There is a positivity warning on the cover of that first edition (a version of this is now on the Help and Support page) that describes the silver threads of joy in life, and we stuck a physical silver thread onto the last page of each copy. I have added a picture in its place for this book (not quite the same, but I am hoping that it leaves you with the same message as was originally intended). This even has a knot in it... to remind me not to forget!

Many of the words that follow are the same as the original, with the addition of this introduction, call to action, postscript and structured chapters for multi-platform formatting. There is also the bibliography at the end that references many of the sources of literary inspiration that continue to guide me. I read so many books as I frantically went through every resource with a fine-toothed comb—with a panic stricken need to understand the unfathomable. Not many were referenced at the time, although we bought multiple copies to distribute to friends and family. I think Mary Frances O'Connor, Ben West and Kate Murphy's publishers must have wondered what was happening in our market town of Leek!

My journey through grief continues to change, like this book. I still find solace in those instagram images I posted and in the original thoughts I put into words, but I am fully aware that they will not provide the answers for everyone. I have been told by many, that the pain I feel as a mother losing her child to suicide, is worse than any other and that they have no idea how I will survive because they could not. I know I have never experienced anything with this intensity or ferocity or with this level of life-threatening utter despair. However, something happened to my son that meant that in that moment he ended his own life, so who am I to claim my struggles in life are worse than anyone else's.

My father and son's life and death taught me humility and that I can only speak for myself. I know that if you diminish **my** hopes and dreams, you dissolve my purpose in living. My sincere wish is that what I have written will give you a desire to find your own purpose and passion, and a sense of hope for **your** future, and perhaps a process to follow, in the absence of any other, if you ever find yourself in need.

You can not change my past, but I choose to believe you have the power to change our future, for the better if you choose to.

B.E.C.K. will help you to:

Become more aware of the skill and purpose of ACTIVE LISTENING.

Create your own safety plan.

Empower others with your knowledge.

Build your resilience to live your fullest life in this world we share together.

My perspective

I want to stress that what I will share with you is only from my perspective. I am a mother grieving first the loss of her father, then the loss of her son—and yes, I have a shed load of guilt going on and I am trying to find answers. But the reason I am writing this is that lots of the things I have learned over the last few months and years of lived experience will, I believe, help our community to be stronger. I have been shocked into learning this; the designer and problem solver in me is trying really hard to make sure I distinguish between the things I cannot change while having the courage to change the things I can. I am still in the thick of it. I think about Beck and mourn the life we lost every day. I am learning that this is part of who I am and how my body reacts at the moment and how it is normal. I am constantly finding new ways to cope.

What I believe, by speaking with people, reading books and looking back on my childhood, is that the knowledge that might help someone who is struggling in the future already exists. I simply want to empower others to connect and share knowledge so that we can all help each other and, ultimately, ourselves.

What I have learned about suicide and mental health is that it is nicer and makes for a happier place if we do not talk about misery all the time. I have learned that we need humour, calmness and routine to feel better (I have also learned that I do not practise what I preach!). At the same time, we need to acknowledge that depression and other forms of mental illness are real and might affect any one of us.

I am an optimist, a glass half-full kind of person; I like to find the positives. I have recently discovered the glass is always full to the brim ... the other half being air! When I was about 40, I read a book called *Flip It* by Michael Heppell that I think sums up this way of thinking beautifully. So to lose my son to suicide was, and still is, a pretty immense test of that philosophy. I now know personally what it feels like to question my reason to live. I now know personally what it feels like to have anxiety and panic attacks ... even though at the time I could not remember those things ever being part of my 53 years of life before Beck died. I personally did not turn towards stimulants and depressants to survive so I can not write about their benefits or perils.

I can only share my story; I can only tell you what I have learned. My goal is to inspire us all to treasure our role in the community and the ability we all have to support ourselves and each other.

I have spent many hours trying to figure out how and why Beck took his life. My mother's guilt blames myself... and I have found lots of research to back my theories, but the reasoning part of me knows that I was not the only influence in my son's life.

A child's community plays an enormous role in how their character develops, but the influences on that child will be unique to their background and circumstances.

For example, I went to a state school. My headteacher, when I was about eleven, held a school assembly. The moral of the story that day was 'Let's agree to differ'. For me, it struck a chord: I seem to remember that my parents were upset about things happening at home at

the time, having arguments that I could see had no right or wrong answer.

For me, that assembly was ground-breaking and is what I have used as a guiding principle in life. I know I am lucky to have been brought up in a loving and safe home, but I still looked up to and respected that headmaster like a father. But I was telling a friend this story recently and the same headmaster held another assembly and was talking about manners. He apparently explained how much more polite the English were than Americans because we use knives and forks and eat with our mouths closed! This school friend was an American—he had a very different opinion of that headmaster to me and certainly did not see him as a supportive father figure.

Guilt over my son's death is an overwhelming emotion for me and something that has made me question my purpose. What helps me to cope, is my understanding and acceptance that I could not possibly be aware of every experience Beck had through his 19 years, or for that matter, that any mother ever could or perhaps should! Our beliefs are influenced by our experiences in life, the communities we live in and those of generations before us. I believe we are each unique, in the way we process significant events and grief in our lives.

You are unique

This book is written from my perspective.

It is my story, offering inspiration for you to create your
own.

Grief

But what do I really mean when I say grief?

The term grief is normally associated with a feeling of great sadness, especially when someone dies. I am reframing this definition here. I would like you to think of it as any event that creates a change to an individual's expectation of their future life, and that this change has a significant impact on their emotional wellbeing.

I could be talking about a car accident while I was driving, the diagnosis of dementia, or the break-up of a marriage. I could be talking about a reaction to winning the lottery, a promotion at work, or falling in love. These are perhaps very adult changes ... note that they are a mix of experiences others might consider both positive and negative.

For a child, it could be falling out with a friend at school, or getting a really low mark in a test. It could be getting a surprisingly high mark in a test, being introduced to a new skill that they could do really well, starting in a new class, or moving home.

As a teenager, perhaps a change in physical appearance as hormones kick in, or people talking to them differently and treating them as an adult. It could be the realisation that they do not have the same moral values as their carers, or discovering and experimenting with the effects of alcohol, nicotine or other drugs.

Of course these events are not unique to these age groups ... I have just used them as examples to try and communicate the expanse of the kinds of experiences that can lead to an expression of grief, and how one

person's pain, anxiety or fear might be another's joy or excitement.

So, when I talk about grief please understand that what I mean is any form of change that impacts our current perception of reality and the future that we had predicted. This in turn creates emotions, thoughts and physical reactions that we might not yet have found a way to cope with safely, and which can have consequences in our daily lives.

What is grief?

Grief is change that has a negative impact on
our emotional wellbeing.

The big WALL

When we grieve, we have the things that we express outwardly like anger, tears, in fact laughter too (people can react in so many ways when they are in shock or are experiencing change), and we have internal emotions that are very personal and private which we tend only to experience in our mind and body, that might not be as obvious to others. We also have an intellectual ability to be aware of these responses. If I was standing in front of you, I would be flinging my arms wide, looking at the outstretched fingers of my left hand, saying 'We have our gut reaction based on our experiences in life...' Then I would look to my right, 'and we have our intellectual awareness based on our understanding of life.'

My gut reaction to Beck's death (left hand), from my mind and body, based on all my personal experience in life so far, is dis-belief: 'This can't be true.', 'How can I change it?', 'I am guilty!', 'What can I do to fix things?'

Meanwhile, my considered intellectual awareness (right hand), with all that I have read, seen and heard in life, allows me to understand that although I will not physically be able to hold him again, I will instead find another way to cherish the bond we still have and the joy he continues to give me.

Some of those gut reactions are due to past experiences and the things we learn. Our brains have a remarkable ability to repair and retrain their structure and synaptic links with feedback from past, present and future events in our lives. We also need to appreciate that as we live, genetic influences, lifestyle choices and accidents can also affect how parts of our brains function, and these

effects might not need, or benefit from, any form of 'repair'.

We also have the effects of emotional trauma on the brain to consider. A group of experts studied brain scans of veterans from the Vietnam war who were suffering from CPTSD (Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder). They discovered that those suffering from CPTSD had parts of their brains inaccessible to the normal firing synapses around them; that they basically looked dark and asleep when they were scanned. But, when memories of the shocking events were triggered, those areas suddenly lit up. When the veterans were able to carefully access those closed-off areas, using different forms of therapy, they were able to overcome the debilitating side effects of CPTSD and engage the full capacity of their brains again.

So this is how I personally imagine the impact of grief and trauma on us... and in writing I am assuming that not all grief is traumatic, but that all trauma creates grief.

When we suffer a big, life-changing experience, we know what has happened intellectually (right hand), but our subconscious brain (waving left hand) might make negative connections with what has happened in our past and what might happen again in the future. It screams—'Aaaah!', 'I'm scared.', 'Not safe.', 'This doesn't feel good.', 'I don't like it.', 'I need to protect myself.', 'I'll build a big wall around that in my brain and I won't go there.' We shut down thoughts that are perhaps too distressing to remember, or that we think might happen again.

When we form a bond with something or someone, be that a friendship, a member of our family or a possession, that relationship becomes enforced by our memories, experiences and expectations of time spent together. These bonds become stronger over time and are formed in all areas of our brain. We do this subconsciously, without even thinking about it. The same applies if we get used to a certain way of life. This means that when a relationship breaks down, someone dies, we lose a precious possession or a dramatic event happens in our lives, then our subconscious thoughts start searching for the stability we had before. We look at all the places in our brains where we have stored these connections and memories, because it does not make sense that they have gone, and that the bonds that we have made that connect us, might have broken.

So we have two things going on—a big wall around the pain we cannot face, and our subconscious mind racing around trying to figure out what has happened.

And when the racing mind hits the wall of pain, we have a panic attack or anxiety attack until we realise what just happened and our subconscious thoughts race away in the opposite direction.

This is the trick, I believe—we have to allow our brains time to do what can be the very natural gut reaction, wall building, racing around, subconscious work, while we keep functioning in as healthy a way as possible... also understanding that while our subconscious is doing all that work, it is taking a lot of brain power or physical energy.

Did you know that the average person's brain is 2% of their body weight, but in normal conditions uses 20% of

their calorie intake! Just think of how much energy it might need when we are processing grief—no wonder we get cravings for quick-fix food types like cake and other sweet treats!

When Beck died, my short and long term memory of events was terrible, I forgot words and I lost the ability to plan anything in the future. This is gradually coming back now, but it was incredibly frightening. I have since discovered this can be a totally normal reaction! Parts of my brain were completely closed off to protect myself from the pain. Meanwhile, my mind was working overtime trying to find Beck while not being able to face the physical reality of what had happened to him.

The Big Wall

We build a big protective wall around our painful
memories.

This allows us to cope with everyday life.

Toolkit

This is where I quote Michael Heppell and I ‘flip it’. I choose to accept that there are loads of methods to help me through these periods in life. I also take care to remember that different things will help different people, because the walls we each build need different tools to help us take them down, and for some they might need to be built really, really thick in the first place.

A healthy routine is super important. Think of a baby or young child ... ask any carer—if you break a child's routine (either food pattern, sleep pattern, exercise) you see that gut reaction, perhaps in the form of a temper tantrum or tears. But apart from healthy routines for your body, another super important thing is expressing and talking about your grief and having someone to listen to you and guide you. Lots of people do this intuitively with their family and friends: it is why living in multi-generational families often helps... but not every family does, and in England especially, I think we shy away from what some people consider delicate, or awkward conversations about emotions.

This sharing, listening and guiding, is all part of life and living in a community. Our community is also the musicians we connect with, the books we read, the films we watch... all of which can answer questions we might be posing to ourselves and may also help guide us.

An essential part of true communication and connection with someone is active listening. When both people are really listening to each other—it is when sparks fly and we see their eyes light up, their emotions and language are in tune with the person they are communicating with

—they seem to really hear and feel and connect with everything being shared.

This is what I try and remember though: When I am grieving, my ability to listen declines ... my brain is busy figuring out the change and trying to make sense of it. But my need for someone to listen to me increases.

Imagine a child in a two parent family. Their grandparent dies. Intellectually, everyone understands this is a natural event, and they naturally grieve. During that grieving, everyone processes their pain differently. Parents may become distant with each other or start to argue, they might no longer be as attentive to their child as they get lost in their own thoughts. While they are consumed with their own grief, which is entirely natural and normal remember, their child is not only grieving the loss of their grandparent, but also the loss of the parents they knew before. This might leave them confused and left to look to others in their community for support.

A teacher might have a model student, who suddenly stops listening in class. Dig a little deeper and that student might be about to move home, maybe their pet has just died, maybe there is something up with their home life.

But the same thing happens to us as adults.

Perhaps there is someone we thought we got on brilliantly with, then we suddenly find we can not talk to anymore. There is a possibility that we are no longer able to be the listener we once were, or that they are managing their own response to change, and their listening skills have altered.

Grieving is a natural part of all stages of life and it is our community that needs to be on the look-out for these cues. Who can we turn to in grief? Someone we trust who will listen with compassion.

I personally do not believe that we can or should try and stop the grieving process... we cannot learn not to grieve because it is a normal and healthy part of life. But I do believe that we can learn how to support someone in grief and help guide them through it; simply by listening carefully to their unique story—without judgement—and helping them to become aware of their own ability to cope. Only if it then seems appropriate, should we offer other possible resources and support.

I also choose to believe that we can learn how to guide ourselves through grief safely. We can learn how to carefully take down those walls in our minds that at first protect us from pain—so that we can access our full potential again.

If we are all taught the skills of active listening, then we will know if someone we are speaking with wants our guidance and we will all recognise a good listener if we need one. Those who are not grieving can carry those who are—until roles are reversed—because it is inevitable that at some point in our lives, we will all grieve. It is a natural part of life—just as we fall as part of the process of learning to walk, and ultimately run—the experience of grief is part of the natural essence of life.

The natural way to navigate the possible dangers that might accompany an individual's response to grief, is therefore to learn how to actively listen to ourselves and to others.

Demolition Plan

First we make the wall around our painful memories safe, by establishing a healthy routine.

Then we get help from our community and the skill of active listening, to carefully take the wall down.

Listening

There are many ways to describe listening. I am going to use four. We all use these at different times and each serves its purpose. I have added examples of why these might be of benefit (+ve) or might harm (-ve) someone we are having a conversation with.

Competitive

We listen with the aim to better the other person with a competing story.

+ve: I hear what someone says, it fires my imagination and I respond with a similar story from my life. For me, at least, it is as though I am indicating that I understand what the other person is talking about, and that their story is infectious. I am then eager to hear their story in return.

-ve: If I am on the receiving end, it can leave me feeling knocked back all the time, as if my voice and experience is not as exciting. If the moment I take a breath the other person jumps in with their own story, it might imply that my life story has no relevance.

Combative

We listen so that we can then persuade the other person to agree with what we are thinking—trying to find ways to change their mind.

+ve: I can remember a discussion with my older sister when I was younger. She claimed that a speed limit was 70mph, when I knew it was 60. I was listening to her argument but was also preparing to explain to her why I was right, with evidence to back my point of view. I must add that by the end of the conversation she agreed with

me, and this stuck in my mind because she was normally always right! This gave me a real sense of pride at the time. Being able to win an argument is often seen as an important and vital skill in political debate.

-ve: If I am with someone who constantly questions my opinion and is combative all the time, I will naturally start to doubt myself and whether anything I say is valid. Over time, this has the potential to give the other person a great sense of power, while leaving me feeling more powerless. If this happens in communities, it can lead to moral decline and anger against the establishment.

Passive

We are doing, or thinking about something completely different while we appear to be listening, so we are listening enough to say the odd 'yes' or 'no' at what appears to be the right time, but we do not have any interest in what the other person is saying at all.

+ve: There are times when simply having someone present in the room with me gives me comfort. I could be talking about anything and they could be busy with their own thoughts, but being physically present has comfort and value to me.

-ve: Being around someone who never responds to anything I say with any meaning, makes me start to believe that there is no purpose in trying to talk to them, and this means that I might gradually stop bothering to say anything at all.

And then there is **Active Listening**.

Three ways to describe listening:

Competitive

We listen and are eager to reply with a similar or better story.

Combative

We listen with the intention of changing the other person's beliefs or opinions.

Passive

We listen, but we are not really interested in anything the other person is saying.

But there is a fourth...

Active Listening

Active Listening

To be an active listener, I am suggesting there are three basic skills that can be learned and applied, these being the three As of Attitude, Attention and Adjustment.

Attitude

We have to be in a good mental state to want to learn. It is really important for us to realise that even if we think we know what the other person is talking about, there is always something we can learn from the conversation. It is impossible for us to have lived their life and therefore it is impossible to be certain we know what they think or feel, or how they experience the world around them.

Attention

It makes sense that we have to pay attention and not be distracted... which is often easier said than done. Some people have a short attention span, which authors like Richard Bandler in his book *Get the Life You Want* claim can be increased with practice. This requires focus and effort. I have read and been told that we can appear to be paying attention by mirroring body language and using eye contact. I believe that these things come naturally, and are recognised by the person we are speaking with, if we are really interested and attentive.

Adjustment

Instead of assuming what the speaker is saying, we adapt to where they are taking us. We listen carefully to their unique story without judgement and repeat what they say in our own words to make sure that we fully understand their point of view. We do this and affirm our understanding before moving forward. The words

themselves are not the only signs we tune into; we consider tone, body language, physical and emotional cues.

If we are concerned for another person's mental wellbeing, there is a fourth vital skill to add to the mix.

Compassion

Here, our role as an active listener is to help someone understand that they have the ability to help themselves, not to tell them what to do. We can instead offer, without any expectation of reward or acceptance, to be their guide with honesty, knowledge and experience. This is while we empower them to find their own unique path through life, using their own strengths and abilities.

I recently read a post on LinkedIn by Asher Siegelman PhD (a clinical psychologist with a speciality in suicide prevention). I am quoting him here because this is such a good example of all these skills in action. You can identify the attitude, attention and adjustment while sensing the compassion shown throughout.

He was describing a training scenario involving a father and his teenage daughter:

She was pacing around her room, completely unregulated. Pulling at her sleeves. Breathing hard. Saying: "My brain won't stop." Then she turned to him and snapped: "Just go. Seriously. I don't want you here."

Most parents will naturally panic in that moment. They push harder, lecture, demand answers, or completely back away. But the father did something different. He

said: "I'm not going to force you to talk. But I'm also not comfortable leaving when you're this overwhelmed."

That balance matters. Not control. Not abandonment. Presence with boundaries.

Then he asked a real question. Not a trap. Not a forced calming. Choice: "I can stay here quietly... or I can sit with you in the room. What feels better right now?"

As the interaction slowed down, she finally said: "I feel like I ruin everything. People would probably be better off without me."

He didn't panic. He didn't rush to reassure her. He didn't argue her feelings away. He stayed steady and said "I'm not going to leave you in this alone."

Eventually she got quieter and said: "...just don't talk so much." And instead of getting defensive, he adjusted. "Okay."

That moment mattered. Because emotional safety is not created through control. It's created when someone feels: seen, not overpowered, and not abandoned inside their pain. When a child is emotionally overwhelmed, parents often feel pressure to take over. But struggling teens do not need more force in the moment. They need someone calm enough to stay connected without taking away their sense of autonomy.

I would like to highlight that Dr Siegelman says that most parents will naturally panic in that moment. My 'flip it' approach tells me that this, therefore, presents an opportunity for these skills to be learned and that we can be taught their importance and relevance, which leads to my gentle warning...

Warning

Active listening takes focus and relevant life experience. I would go so far as to suggest that it is impossible and inappropriate to be an active listener to everyone or anyone all the time. As I have described, we need to apply the three As of Attitude, Attention and Adjustment while adding in the all-important Compassion. This is why we should try not to rely on one person or one resource to be our active listener when we need one. However, the stronger we make our community of active listeners, the more resilient I believe we will all become.

And there is an extra thought to consider—if you are always the active listener, the person or people you are listening to might become dependant on you and your abilities. By allowing them to listen to and support **you**, you could give them the power to realise they have their own strengths and wisdom that they can share with others.

Taking turns when listening is similar to the concept of using a mediator in an argument or dispute, where someone independent makes sure that each person has a chance to be fully listened to. By fully understanding the other person's point of view, agreements are often reached more easily.

When you are supporting someone who is suicidal, if your goal is to protect them, and their goal is to end their lives... perhaps you need to listen to each other to move to a place where both of you are safe.

I do not believe that it is our role to be other people's saviours through their grief or experiences in life, but whether we want to be or not, we are part of society. By

understanding how our ability to listen changes in grief, ultimately we will live in a community that thrives together—and if we guide our friends to be better listeners and explain why it is important, then we will all end up helping each other, and ourselves, in times of need.

Safety plan for your Community

Now, with this awareness of what makes a good active listener, you can create your own safety plan or support someone as they create their own.

*NHS research indicates that:

1 in 4 adults have had thoughts of suicide at some point in their lives.

1 in 13 have attempted suicide... and they are the ones who are alive to be asked!

These are shocking statistics to read for some, as it might make suicidal ideation more common than they had considered it to be. It might bring comfort to the 1 in 4, and 1 in 13, to know that they are not alone. I would also like to highlight that this indicates that 75% of the population might never have had thoughts of suicide. I believe this is what makes addressing any preventative approaches so much harder—because the majority of people simply do not understand what is such a normal (and often hidden or secret) part of life for others.

However, we can prepare suicide prevention strategies, to give ourselves hope for the future, in the moments or periods of time in our lives, when we might need it most.

For those of us that know, when thoughts of suicide are overwhelming, staying safe for even 5-10 minutes takes a great deal of strength. Many organisations and support services promote the use of safety plans during these times. The idea behind a safety plan is not to remove thoughts of suicide completely, but to keep us all safe in that moment and to give us the opportunity to explore support for whatever is creating those emotions.

Thoughts and beliefs can change over time, affected by who we meet and our general experiences in life. A safety plan allows us to concentrate on what we can do in the moment, so that we and our community can stay safe during that period. I call it a community safety plan because there is a ripple effect when you take action to end your life. You do not only end your life, but you affect the lives of those you live among—your community. This is written from my perspective as a mother experiencing the loss of my son to suicide, but I choose to believe that every one of us has the power to save the life of any parent's child. And if you think about it, this means everyone can save anyone's life, including their own.

You do not necessarily need to be struggling with suicidal thoughts yourself for this to be an important process to follow. Remember that grief can hit us all out of nowhere, so we should all be prepared.

You can create your own safety plan, or support someone as they create their own. Think of your mental wellbeing on a scale of 1-10 (10 meaning good and 1 not so good). If you are at a 10, that is the perfect time for you to work on your own plan. If you are at about a 3 or below, it might be a good idea to find someone who is scoring higher, and is a good active listener, to help guide you.

Note: it is very important that you believe in the process and you make the plan personal and relevant to your own experience and life. If you find this difficult, you might want to seek help from a professional who is able to skilfully help you as you work out what you need, like the free support and resources offered by Papyrus www.papyrus-uk.org.

Create your plan in your own style, in a way that is simple to follow. I am suggesting you answer these questions...

1. *What will I do to calm myself in the moment?*
2. *What will I tell myself (as an alternative to choosing to end my life)?*
3. *What would I say to a close friend if I knew they were feeling this way?*
4. *What could others do that might help?*
5. *Who do I know who is good at actively listening to me if I am worried or upset?*
6. *What charities and support groups, that fully understand the need to listen, offer 24/7 services?*
7. *What will I say or do to start a conversation?*

8. *Am I aware of any warning signs or triggers that make me feel more out of control?*
9. *What have I done in the past that has helped me improve my wellbeing... what ways of coping do I already have?*
10. *Do I use any drugs, alcohol or medication to cope? These can make it harder to stay safe if they make me more impulsive or lower my mood. What can I do to make these safer?*
11. *How will I get emergency help if I have taken action and my life is in immediate danger?*

Once you have your answers to these and questions like them, you can keep them written down, or you can record spoken words, use illustrations, pieces of music or paint a picture that allows you to remember them. Keep a copy of your plan where you can easily find it. Writing the answers down or documenting them in some way is important because you use a different part of your brain to process them, which helps them have more meaning. Just remember that someone you might be helping will have different life experiences to you, so work with their skill set.

The idea, which might sound simple if you have not been there, is that when you are experiencing suicidal thoughts you pause... and follow your plan, until you—and those around you—are safe. You may also need to pause... and return to your plan many times, which is a totally natural, healthy and normal thing to do.

I am focusing on suicidal thoughts because this is where my experience lies, but I would also extend the purpose of a community safety plan to include anyone about to self-harm or harm others. I have heard some people justify self-harm as a form of suicide prevention. I would prefer to offer a safety plan as a possible support mechanism.

In 1960, the Ministry of Transport in the British government, introduced a system for vehicles that helped to make them safe to drive and to protect other road users—a system that now requires cars to have a yearly test (an MOT) to protect communities. The Public Health Act of 1875 led to regular household waste collection (now every couple of weeks if you are lucky) to help protect communities from disease. A safety plan

could become a standard part of your personal first aid kit, as familiar a process as servicing your car or having your bins emptied. Your plan might change over time, so you could refresh it, just like organising to take a car to a garage or putting the rubbish out... you might add a note in the diary to do this each year/each month/every few weeks... whatever works for you and your stage of life.

Having put the effort in, the phrase to then learn and remember becomes:

Pause... follow your safety plan, find an active listener and share your thoughts with them.

Because once you fully understand the crisis, only then can you be guided, or guide others, to safety.

What makes a skilled Active Listener?

Attitude

Someone who wants to hear what we have to say.

Attention

Someone who is not distracted.

Adjustment

Someone who tries to fully understand us by asking the right questions.

Compassion

Someone who does not tell us what to do but empowers us to understand using our own strengths and abilities.

IMPORTANT

Always Remember

it is virtually impossible to be an active listener all the time, either to our own thoughts or for others, especially when we are in distress. This is why we must not rely on one person or resource, but instead start to build our community of listeners.

When your thoughts turn to
self-harm, suicide or harm to others:

PAUSE...

Follow your safety plan.
Find an active listener.
Share your thoughts with them.

ACTIVE LISTENING

is what I believe **might** have saved my son,
who died by suicide, aged 19.

Active listening and a safety plan
might help save *your* life,
or the life of someone *you* love.

SHOUT

In the weeks after Beck died, I added SHOUT 85258 as a favourite in my phone. This is a free text messaging service I discovered, that is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, to anyone in the UK who is struggling to cope. I found that there were times when I believed talking about how much I felt to blame and how much I did not want to live, would be a burden and would hurt those I loved; that the emotions I wanted and needed to express might make their sorrow worse if I was open about them. It somehow felt easier to me, having someone anonymous to share these emotions with.

The SHOUT text messaging service became a part of my own personal safety plan.

I am now able to laugh at one conversation I had with them. Basically, the person I was texting was delayed in answering, but I carried on texting, blindly unaware in my panic that no-one had yet answered. This event highlighted to me that simply thinking someone was paying attention at the other end of the text service—in that moment—meant that I was able to talk myself into a better place. I was then able to regulate my panic and understand how my gut reaction was affecting my mind and body.

I have used the support service three times to date and have not recently, but it is still there as a favourite in my phone, as a reminder that there is always someone out there who will listen and guide me to safety, even if that person ends up being me.

This is not my only resource, and I keep updating my plan. Ben West (with his brother Sam beside him), for

example, has just launched *www.reasonstostay.co.uk*. Not only does it, as its name suggests, give the visitor a reason to stay and choose life in that moment, it also empowers you to help give someone else a reason to stay. I would recommend that if you have ever experienced profound loss or change, you visit the website... your experience and any letter you share, may help guide others, and if you are finding it hard to navigate life at the moment, it might give you hope for your own future.

But do not trust me on this ... do your own research too. The text service SHOUT and the *reasonstostay* website are just two of many ways to access support 24 hours a day in the UK, but there are many others. Find a style and technique that works for you. Remember, it is your life and the lives of those you care about that you are insuring, not mine. That said, if you are reading this, you are part of Beck's community and I care that, in Ben West's words, you have a 'reason to stay'.

My goal is for everyone to be aware of active listening and safety planning as a suicide prevention method. I have prepared a printable A4 community safety plan guide. This is free to download from a website created in my son's name: *www.beckbromley.com*.

These are examples of four websites and an app that will show you other styles of safety plan that you might prefer.

www.papyrus-uk.org/resource-suicide-safety-plan/

www.every-life-matters.org.uk/safety-planning/

www.merseycare.nhs.uk/health-and-wellbeing/what-recovery/person-centred-safety-planning

www.rcpsych.ac.uk/docs/default-source/improving-care/nccmh/suicide-prevention/monthly-clinic/ohft-safety-planning-guidance.pdf

Grassroots Suicide Prevention, *stay alive* app.

Even if you have never experienced suicidal thoughts yourself, I am guessing that you can see that there is no 9am-5pm rule for grief. So here I offer a few examples of how (in the UK) you can access free, listening services and guidance any time, day or night, every day of the year—including bank holidays!

Text SHOUT to 85258

(www.giveushout.org : ‘...a free text service available 24/7 to anyone in the UK who is struggling to cope’)

Call 116 123

(www.samaritans.org : ‘...the charity that prevents suicide through the power of human connection’)

Call Hopeline 0800 068 4141

Papyrus also offer a 24/7 British Sign Language translation service.

(www.papyrus-uk.org : ‘...exists to reduce the number of young people who take their own lives, by shattering the stigma surrounding suicide and equipping young people and their communities with the skills to recognise and respond to emotional distress.’)

www.reasonstostay.co.uk

‘...a global suicide prevention project reaching people at difficult moments through anonymous letters written by volunteers from all around the world.’

www.sayitlad.com

‘...real lads opening up about what they’ve been through and how it’s helped them become the man they are today.’

Some services have let me down in the past—in ways I do not want to share here—which is why I find it hard to recommend one over another. This has, however, meant that I try and remember that they are real people answering my call or text, and so I would always now consider trying again to connect with someone else. Any listening and support skills depend on timing, relevant life experience, training and the connection I make with the person who I am communicating with. Although that seems like a lot to get right, it is possible.

My son died by suicide; whatever his struggles were at the time, they did not end with his death. I have witnessed that they were multiplied a thousand fold and carried on the shoulders of those he loved and leaves behind: his family and community.

I want you to know that you can help yourself, or someone else, if you or they are suicidal. I hope this tool of creating a safety plan makes the process less frightening and makes it easier to talk about suicide prevention. I am often told ‘...but you know it wasn’t your fault’ to appease the natural emotions of guilt that accompany suicide loss. As this gets reinforced it might

imply, that there is therefore nothing anyone can or should do to help me, if I ever feel suicidal myself.

I choose to believe there is—and that I can:

Pause... *follow my safety plan, find an active listener and share my thoughts with them.*

My hope is that you will understand the significance and relevance of this phrase—that it will ultimately protect not only my own life and yours, but can be used as a suicide prevention strategy to help protect communities worldwide.

Safety Plan Resources

www.papyrus-uk.org/resource-suicide-safety-plan/

www.every-life-matters.org.uk/safety-planning/

www.merseycare.nhs.uk/health-and-wellbeing/what-recovery/person-centred-safety-planning

www.beckbromley.com

www.prevent-suicide.org.uk/stay-alive-app-grassroots-suicide-prevention/about-stay-alive

www.rcpsych.ac.uk/docs/default-source/improving-care/nccmh/suicide-prevention/monthly-clinic/ohft-safety-planning-guidance.pdf

24/7 Listening Services and Guidance

Text SHOUT to 85258

Call the Samaritans on 116 123

Call Hopeline 0800 068 4141

British Sign Language BSL

www.papyrus-uk.org/hopeline247-british-sign-language-support/

www.reasonstostay.co.uk

www.sayitlad.com

Why B.E.C.K.?

If we all practise our listening skills with family and friends and our communities, we will naturally develop our resilience and ability to listen to ourselves and others. This will also hopefully make us more aware of the times when we need to find a good listener and the qualities to look for. This is where Beck, who supported so many with his smile, personality and ability to listen to others, can still help us now.

In crisis, when I can not forgive myself or others for the things that have happened in the past and my fears of what might happen in the future are taking control of my emotions, I try and use B. E. C. and K. and my own unique safety plan to help guide me...

B. Believe in the now and trust in the future. I take a long breath out—raise my eyes, and take a moment to look at, listen to, laugh with and love the detail in the world around me in this moment.

E. Examine my thoughts with compassion. Remembering that all forms of non-forgiveness (guilt, regret, resentment, grievances, sadness) are based on what I think happened in the past, while all forms of fear (unease, anxiety, tension, stress, worry) are based on what I believe will happen in the future. I know that thoughts and beliefs can change with time.

C. Courage to change negative thoughts and beliefs to positive by holding hands with my companions, be they my pen, books, musicians, friends, family, or my wider community.

K. Kindness is King to myself and as I empower others with my kick-ass solutions. And by kick-ass I mean a metaphorical karate kick with a smile on my face as I knock out the pain.

I do not use the word *kick-ass* lightly. For me, in this context, it holds passion and determination to take a stand and have impact, with no physical violence... a smile and a kick of humour that I want to make sure I do not ever forget.

I choose to believe that post-traumatic growth is real and a force to be reckoned with. What I am sharing here—in writing this book—is one of my solutions to the grief and trauma I have experienced, and I hope it will empower others.

Your solutions to grief will be as unique as you are in this world!

The Beck Bromley United event (@beckbromleyunited) in Beck's home town of Leek, planned in June each year, is an example of a solution offered by Beck's wider family of friends and his community... if you are in the area, you are very welcome to join us.

I encourage us all to find ways to embrace and thrive in the pain of loss. I now try to walk with B.E.C.K.... safe in the knowledge that my son is free to walk, run, surf, skate and strum with everyone wherever they are.

B.E.C.K.

Believe

in the now and trust in the future.

Examine

my thoughts with compassion.

Courage to Change

negative thoughts and beliefs to positive.

Kindness is King

to myself, and as I empower others.

Explore

To find active listeners and improve your active listening skills, consider training courses, local face to face groups and digital services like those offered by:

Andy's Man Club www.andysmanclub.co.uk

Changes Health and Wellbeing www.changes.org.uk

Grass Roots Suicide Prevention
www.prevent-suicide.org.uk

Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide or SOBS for short
www.uksobs.com

Suicide and Co. www.suicideandco.org

Zero Suicide Alliance www.zerosuicidealliance.com

Please bear in mind that this is a small selection based on my personal experience of suicide loss, and there are many other services that might suit your needs better. These courses and supports are all free to access.

Charitable organisations are often borne from experiences of extreme loss, and love, by their creators and their volunteers. The benefit of hindsight allows me to appreciate that this actually makes the services they offer extremely valuable because the people running them have such depth of knowledge and understanding. If you are willing and able, please consider donating to, or volunteering for, services that you feel most connection to.

During the weeks and months after Beck died, I personally found solace in books. Some might say slightly frenetic reading, trying to make some kind of sense of my new reality. *B.E.C.K.* was not only shaped by my 55 years of life experience, but also the wisdom of these authors. I have listed as many of them as I can in the bibliography in an attempt to thank the authors. I have explained what some of the books taught me in very general terms, but of course, if you read them, you might not like their style, language or format. I read some of them after I wrote that first edition: perhaps reading is a major part of my own personal safety plan process.

These three books were the ones my husband and I bought to give to our community soon after Beck died (referenced ** in the bibliography). We thrust them into the hands of anyone who would accept them!

This Book Could Save Your Life by Ben West

The Grieving Brain by Mary Frances O'Connor PhD

You're Not Listening by Kate Murphy

We hoped that they might help others as they had helped us. I did not have the capacity to read Ben's book at the time, but my husband found comfort in it. The words of Mary Frances O'Connor and Kate Murphy formed the groundwork for me, from which I wanted to explore further. There are a few scientific books in the bibliography, possibly because I have an engineering degree and I like programming and logic. I am also an artist and business owner by profession so love

juxtaposing the creative with the logical. My faith is not defined by any scripture, and although I have not detailed them here, I do find comfort in the teachings found in many religious texts.

The cost of love

It is not in my nature to share the depths of my pain, but reading the account written by Beck's elder sister, I realised that sometimes sharing what we all feel helps others to know they are not alone and that their feelings are normal.

She wrote:

I think I've felt every emotion since losing Beck.

I've felt broken, not just my heart but my whole body.

I've felt angry. Angry at the help we begged for and didn't receive. Angry at other people for being ok, for sharing their stories of how they survived, how come they got to get through it and Beck didn't? Angry at people for complaining about their family or their siblings when I would have done anything for him to be there annoying me like siblings do.

I've felt overwhelming guilt. The type that wakes you up in the night with a racing heart. It doesn't matter how many people tell me in different ways that it wasn't my fault, he was my little brother and I wasn't there to save him. I don't think I'll ever not feel that way.

I've felt moments of happiness, and then immediately ashamed that I could be happy without him. For a long time, I'd know that a 'good day' would always be followed by a period of bad days, as if I'd used up all the happiness I could find and would have to balance it out with feeling terrible again.

I've felt sad. Sad with my own grief, even more sad watching as the hearts of the people I love break, knowing that there's absolutely nothing I can do to make it any better.

I've felt numb. This was a weird one, especially after feeling every emotion so strongly. The things that have always fuelled and driven me, made me feel nothing at all.

I've felt anxious, exhausted, drained, lost, damaged, hopeless.

What's crazy is that all of these emotions feel completely insignificant in comparison to the feeling of missing him.

This feeling is too big to describe in a couple of sentences. Whoever said that time is a healer definitely wasn't talking about this part of grief. The more time that goes by, the more I miss him. Knowing I'll never get to give him a big hug and tell him I love him again is almost unbearable...

I have shared what our daughter wrote here, with her permission, as I have also felt all of this and more. Time may not be a healer; it has, however, given me the chance to learn and to grow. For me, it has been reading and searching for answers that has helped me survive my own personal overwhelming guilt and sorrow. I have to laugh at the things I read that sometimes set me back. One book, all about the science of authentic happiness, also asserts that of course of all the things that are hardest, if not impossible to recover from, are the loss of a child and the loss of a parent to Alzheimer's. Thank

goodness they did not also mention suicide. How to set someone up to fail!

That said, that book revealed a method that helps with my guilt and blame (a five step process to master forgiveness), which I am going to try and adapt to figure out how to forgive myself.

I am also learning about post-traumatic growth—how trauma can lead to such a dramatic change in our way of thinking that it can transform us, for the better if we let it.

I have learned that each of us has a unique set of core strengths developed through our life experiences.

The worst days and moments for me are generally companions of lack of sleep, food, exercise and routine, or anything that raises my heart rate through anxiety, like deadlines and pressure at work.

Writing allows me to privately draw myself out of sadness and brain-dump my worries (as long as I focus on the purpose of writing in the first place, and give myself time to slow my racing thoughts).

Talking with the right people at the right time allows me to process the sadness and lift it from my primitive obsessing and into the present world of self-help.

I have noticed that if I look up, it not only changes what I see, it also lifts my mood.

I have a playlist that only has songs and music that make me want to dance.

Crying in the shower, I personally find, is great... albeit mixed with the dribble of water from an electric shower that Beck always hated.

Creating artwork, for me, is a fantastic immersion distraction to give my mind a rest.

Helping other people and trying to share all I have learned over the last year (now three) is the thing that personally gives me most reward... ok, that and sneaking the odd chocolate sugar rush!

I am not saying the bad days are not bad, and I mean really life-crushingly bad, but I am gradually figuring things out—and if I can do what is meant to be impossible, then my real message to all Beck's friends, and to others experiencing the shock of loss, be it loved ones or a way of life, is to say that what we all feel is totally normal. I am offering my hand to give you a lift and maybe we can all share our pain and our tricks of survival with our communities so that we can all stay safe, learn and grow together.

I believe that I learned all of the above by actively listening to myself, and other people of all ages, who have experience of trauma, grief and loss.

For the health and wellbeing of your community,
and to live your life to the full,

learn...

**ACTIVE
LISTENING**

The Serenity Prayer

The Serenity Prayer is a reflection that offers comfort to many. My research indicates that it was first written by the theologian Reinhold Niebuhr in the 1930s-40s (although it appears to be derived from many much older doctrines). It starts with the line...

‘God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference...’

I first came across this prayer in a book. The second time, it was engraved into a smooth metal pebble that fitted into the palm of my hand, offered by Roger (a fellow dog walker) a week later when I was sharing my pain and he was being my active listener.

My version is not actually a prayer in the religious sense. I have chosen to believe everyone has the ability inside themselves to create powerful change for the better.

This is why, when things are really tough, I try and stay in the present and pause...

PAUSE...

I pause... and accept the things I cannot change.

I have the courage to change the things I can.

I listen to life's lessons that teach me to understand
the difference between the two.

I embrace the joy in life and empower others.

... and I offer this delicate silver thread. For me, it is a
reminder that however fine and close to invisible it may
be, there is always something to be found that glimmers.



PostScript

I admit that there are sleepless nights, tears and overwhelm that sit behind me writing this book and taking action, but a lot of what I write is simply the stoicism of humanity that helps pick us all up when we fall. I make no claims that safety planning for suicide prevention is anything new. How many people say ‘...love you’ as part of an everyday farewell? Perhaps this simple act reinforces community bonds that in themselves can give people a reason to live and regain their purpose and passion for life when they might need it most.

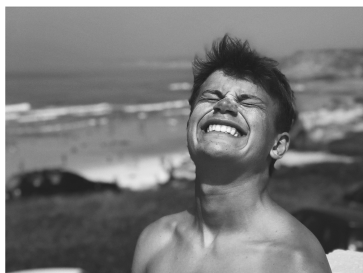
I know that active listening and following a safety plan saved my life, and I choose to believe that suicide is preventable, which gives me hope for the future.

Perhaps, by sharing what I have learned, I can pass that sense of hope to someone else and empower them to make a difference to both their future and the futures of those they love.

Beck, my life experiences and a mother’s grief have all helped me to learn that we need a community of active listeners to help us survive life’s natural depths of despair and exhilarating highs.

You and I will never know how Beck might have chosen to change the world, had he lived longer than his 19 years. I will, however, continue to fight for my son, in the passionate belief that he is still able to change the world with his smile.

Beck Bromley 2003 - 2022 and beyond



Call to Action

To quote Rutger Bergman in the epilogue of his book *Moral Ambition*, ‘Your behaviour is contagious, so a better world does indeed begin with you... your choices can in turn influence the choices of dozens, hundreds, or even millions of other people.’

Therefore...

1: Practise the skill of active listening, not all the time, but why not challenge yourself? Enjoy the process and see if you can improve your listening skills for your own wellbeing and that of your community. This is not a skill to give you power over others, but to help your community thrive.

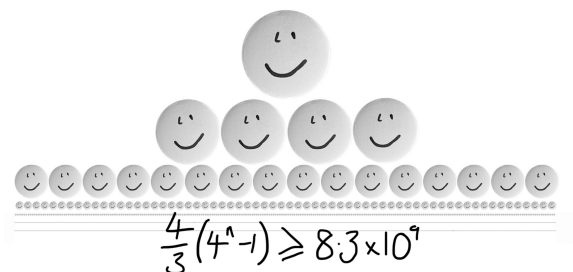
2: Download the FREE A4 active listening and safety plan guide from www.beckbromley.com
No strings attached, no subscriptions. Print it and put it in your first aid kit at home/college/gym/place of work or worship ... for others to discover.

3: If *statistics say that 1 in 13 adults has attempted suicide—and with all the information I have shared in this book still fresh in your thoughts—say out loud now, ‘I am going to create my own safety plan this week, because one day it might save my life’. Decide when, and make it happen.

4: If *1 in 4 adults has had thoughts of suicide, and you share your knowledge this week about active listening and safety planning with just 4 people, there is a strong possibility that your own actions might just save someone else’s life too. Pause... say, and write their names now, with a note beside each of when and where you will tell them, (they can be family, friends,

neighbours or strangers). If you are not sure how to start the conversation, you could simply tell them about the *beckbromley.com* website or share a copy of this book.

And just think, if you ask each of them to share this knowledge with 4 people the following week, and they choose to share and share again ... it could take less than 17 weeks for Beck's smile to carry this message around the world!



week 1: 4 people

week 17 : THE WORLD!

Help protect yourself and others

CREATE
your own safety plan

PRACTISE
active listening

and

SHARE
your knowledge with a smile



*** Statistics**

When you see a * symbol before a statistic in this book, it was taken from data published in November 2025.

This survey was commissioned by NHS England, funded by the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), and carried out by the National Centre for Social Research, the University of Leicester, and City St George's, University of London. The term adult refers to those aged 16 and over.

This is a link to the on-line resource:

<https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/adult-psychiatric-morbidity-survey/survey-of-mental-health-and-wellbeing-england-2023-24/data-quality-statement>

I draw your attention to section 4.3 results:

‘...a quarter of adults (25.2%) reported that they had thoughts of taking their own life at some point.’

‘...one in thirteen adults (7.8%) reported having made a suicide attempt at some point in their life ... This equates to an estimated 3.6 million adults.’

Bibliography

The books listed are in the following format:

Author (surname, first name). **Title**. Publisher and Year of publication of the copy that I have.

There are quite a few, but I am not suggesting you read them all. I am crediting and thanking their authors and publishers for the effort they put in, which has helped this mother through her grief.

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(Richard and Tor taught me the power of a smile.)

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(A book my younger daughter was studying at school, which resonated.)

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(This was a super heavy read but the basis of many theories which I wanted to explore for myself to form my own judgements.)

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Leaf Dr., Caroline. ***Cleaning Up Your Mental Mess***. Baker Books, 2021.

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(Kate is a journalist and I don't remember this being a book about grief. I think she sums up the beauty of learning to listen and what a difference it can make in anyone's life.)

Newson Dr., Louise. ***The Definitive Guide to the Perimenopause & Menopause***. Yellow Kite, 2023.

(Yes, I am also navigating the perimenopause and menopause and I found this book, along with HRT, incredibly supportive.)

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(This book, was a gift to my husband, the week after Beck died. I read it first and it is the book I credit today for my survival. A massive thank you to Mary Frances, and to David, who gave us the book.)

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(I first read this when I was 19, and it left a lasting impression.)

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(This is the book that provided a structured method for forgiving others. Martin Seligman also has a website www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu/ that has loads of freely accessible resources.)

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(Ben is a massive campaigner for mental wellbeing and suicide prevention @iambenwest.)

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(A friend introduced me to one of these; I then sourced the others. Each lists 100 practical ideas for support.)

Smiling is Infectious

I cannot resist leaving you with a very special poem that I have known for years, and recently discovered was written by Jez Alborough in his children's book, ***Shake before Opening***, published by Hutchinson Children's Books in 1991. He has given me permission to publish it here... with a special guest appearance from Beck. I urge you to bathe in its humour and instruction.

*Smiling is infectious,
you catch it like the flu.
When someone smiled at me today
I started smiling, too.*

*I passed around the corner
and someone saw my grin.
When he smiled, I realised,
I'd passed it on to him.*

*I thought about Beck's smile,
and realised its worth.
A single smile like his
could travel round the earth.*

*So...
If you feel a smile begin,
don't leave it undetected.
Let's start an epidemic quick
and get the world infected.*

Not “The End”...

The Beginning!