

# soul survival guide

## the darker shores of the soul

Hopelessness and despair lie on the darker shores. Many of us visit this lonely place during our lives, with some never returning. This chapter explores those farthest reaches and how to make our way back if we find ourselves there.

### falling into the pit

For some it is a sudden drop, others a slow slide. Whichever way, the pit is a deep and lonely place. Little light makes its way in and sometimes disappears altogether.

People tell us we are not alone, but this brings little comfort. It only confirms that the world is full of pain. Or it makes us feel guilty – life is a gift, and we are wasting it.

Mental health isn't like other illness. How much is us and how much the condition? It's hard to tell where it begins and ends. The chemical and neurological aspects are only one side of the story, part of the interplay between how we were brought up, the way we think, and where we are in our lives.

No single treatment is going to make everything all right. This places a large onus on the individual. While support from others is crucial, it's ultimately down to us – and this makes it daunting. The steps to self-help can feel like hurdles, with the ever-present risk of being knocked back. Added to this, local mental health services are often over-stretched. With everything against us like this, why not just stay in the pit? Well, we can of course. We can stay there for as long as we like. Or we can opt out. Sometimes suicide seems to be the only choice.

### when you want to cut the rope

The statistics are staggering. Up to a million people in the world commit suicide each year, with many more attempting it. Despite this, it's still a taboo subject.

The truth is, life sometimes feels too much to bear. Thrown onto the darker shores, suicide can seem the best option, a rational choice even. It's not that we want to die, we want the pain to end.

The taboo makes it difficult to express suicidal thoughts, but talking about them reduces their power. If you are having thoughts about ending your life, please call The Samaritans or similar service. It can be a life-saver – literally – offering the kind of non-judgemental support which is often difficult for loved ones to give. You don't have to

wait until you are on the verge of suicide or in the middle of an attempt. They are there to talk to at any time. Expressing your darkest thoughts to someone neutral but compassionate can bring a huge sense of relief and may well be the turning point.

There are millions of people living happy and healthy lives who have considered suicide. There is something potentially liberating about going to that far shore and standing on the cusp between life and death. The trick, of course, is coming back from it; looking death square in the face but choosing life.

## **climbing back out**

When we're at the bottom of the pit, it seems impossible to get out of it. But there are hand and footholds to help us. It's just that we can't always see them, especially at the beginning. Like a climber, we have to feel about, finding places to take hold to help ourselves up.

Everyone's climb is different and it may take a long time, but every inch upwards is a move in the right direction. You can also make a safety net as you go along, so the drop behind you isn't as far.

Here are some ideas to get you started: