

CASE STUDY 6

Support for Seafarer with Suicidal Thoughts

My Mind Matters

An Indian seafarer who 'felt like committing suicide' contacted the helpline for help with his personal problems. He had been feeling lonely throughout the four months that he had been on his vessel and did not want to burden his family by sharing these emotions with them. Unfortunately he did not feel comfortable discussing his concerns with his colleagues for fear of being reported and sent home by his company.

The seafarer explained: 'Everyone has problems. My inner self used to tell me that disclosing it to everyone would not make it right or return happiness.'

Providing emotional support is part of the helpline's service and since the team is multilingual this was given to the seafarer in his own language, enabling him to express himself fully. The team reassured him about the confidentiality of the exchange and the non-judgemental nature of the service, which prompted him to open up about the things that had been bothering him.

The seafarer had first experienced homesickness when he had to leave home at an early age to study at an all-boys boarding school. Growing up in an exclusively male environment he felt that his lack of exposure left him unprepared for relationships with the opposite sex. After joining a vessel the seafarer had two difficult and unsuccessful relationships after which he found himself developing suicidal thoughts. The seafarer shared his worries with the helpline on how the combination of his past experiences continued to affect him.

The helpline team acknowledged the seafarer's courage to admit his suicidal thoughts. The team reviewed the self-care strategies already being used by the seafarer and offered help in finding a professional who could provide specialist assistance. With his consent, the team located a professional counsellor and organised counselling sessions for him while at sea.

The seafarer ultimately chose not to take the free counselling sessions, but over the next six months the helpline team kept in contact with him to check on his progress. He said that he appreciated how the team continued to follow up on how he was feeling and the fact that he was given continued support. He said that knowing that the helpline was there helped to ease his burden and he was very grateful.

The seafarer has now confirmed that he is doing very well and is addressing his issues. He told us that he is now channelling his energies into taking courses and preparing for his career advancement exams.

The helpline team happily provides long term support to seafarers who are experiencing personal difficulties.

Source: International Seafarer's Welfare and Assistance Network (ISWAN)

