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Benjamin

I WAS A HAPPY FARMER. UNTIL THE DAY WHEN EVERYTHING FELL APART.

I'm 42 years old and I had never seen a shrink before. In my family, we used to say: "Benjamin, if you've got a problem, you deal with it! There's no point in complaining before it hurts, fear doesn't prevent danger." We didn't turn a blind eye to suffering (actually, my family has always been very supportive), but the problem shouldn't take over everything.

Fifteen days ago, I got hit hard. I read a text message on my wife's phone and realized she'd been unfaithful. She hadn't been doing well for some time. The kids had noticed and were suffering from it. I was trying to help the whole family, but it was heavy to carry. I was alone, and I couldn't be the lover, the partner, the therapist, and the support all at once. Let alone the man who's been cheated on.

So I went into "commando mode." I wanted to talk to my mother, but she's getting old and I didn't want to worry her. As the days passed, I was hurting more and more, mentally and physically. That thing that tightens your stomach and bends you over. I couldn't eat or sleep anymore.

I was at rock bottom, I won't lie. I couldn't see a way out. And it was by going on the 3114 website that I understood. I recognized myself in the descriptions. Before calling, I asked myself, "Am I really at this point?" It wasn't very clear in my head, but I think I had a bad image of people who are unhappy. I thought I was strong, rational... But that night, I wasn't just strong and not just rational.

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A nurse picked up the phone. Estelle. Hats off to her.

She sensed that I was in a state of distress, and she told me so. Despite my hesitation, she managed to get me to talk, just like in a conversation. I tried not to cry so I'd be understandable, and also so I wouldn't waste her time because I figured there were probably others waiting. But the way she got the words out of me! Gently and with understanding. She took her time. I remember she said, "You have the right to be angry." And hearing that really helped.

It's a relief to know you're allowed to say "I'm suffering." She told me I could call back whenever I wanted, that there would always be someone to answer, even if there might be a bit of a wait. Now I've got resources, and if things went badly tomorrow, I could turn to them.

I'm not out of the woods yet, and I won't forget my problems. But I'm seeing a therapist now, and I'm starting to see that there are possibilities.

For anyone going through these moments, I'd like to say: "If you've got car trouble, you go to the mechanic. If you've got a plumbing issue, you call the plumber. So if you've got suicidal thoughts, you call 3114. You're not alone. The future still holds a future."

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Jonathan

I'M 38 YEARS OLD AND MY NAME IS JONATHAN.

It took me years to talk about my story. In fact, I waited until my first burnout to finally do it.

My childhood was marked by my parents' divorce. My father left my mother for another man. This was back in the year 90s, and homosexuality was still considered a disease. It wasn't like today. We lived in a small town, so the news spread quickly. At school, I was bullied, and it really broke me down. My mother's only fear was that I too might have this "disease." So she tried to make me very "masculine," to "toughen me up." When I told her I was afraid of the dark, she made me go down to the basement and would often turn off the light. Since then, I'm no longer afraid of the dark. I'm not afraid of anything, really. Even dying doesn't scare me. Actually, I had my first suicidal thoughts when I was seven.

I've always refused to feel my emotions. Any time I felt something that made me want to cry, I turned it into anger. Then I had a burnout, and everything came crashing back down on me. That's when I finally understood I had to stop bottling everything up. Am I handling it better now? That's another story!

These days, it's hard for me to hide my emotions. I was raised with things like "Be nice, be quiet, be good," and "You have no reason to complain, you have a roof over your head, food to eat... Think about the children around the world." But the more you don't complain, the more you pile it all up inside.

It also turns out that people likely missed the fact that I'm what they call "gifted." My mind is constantly racing. I'm flooded with questions. So much so that I often can't keep up with myself. And that day, I just needed to let go, to talk to someone outside my circle. I told myself, "Even if I cry, the person won't know what I look like, so if we cross paths in the street, they won't recognize me."

It took me a long time searching online to find a professional to talk to, and I came across the 3114 number by chance.

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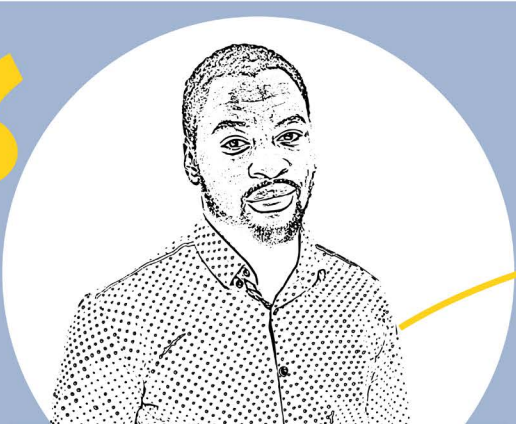
I said, "I'm calling you, I don't know why, and I don't know what to say."

I was lost. The responder said, "What's going on?" and the conversation flowed from there. We stayed on the phone for an hour. It helped me unload a bit, because she was incredibly kind and compassionate. Her words carried a real intention to help. I felt that to her, my pain, my suffering, were real. Sometimes, we try to explain to people why we hurt, and they just don't hear it, so we shut down.

But at that moment, I was able to lay myself "bare." I wasn't holding anything back. I didn't have to endure anyone's gaze; I couldn't see the expression on her face. And even if they ask for your name and first name, there is still anonymity.

If tomorrow someone came to me and said, "Listen, I'm not okay, I don't know what to do," I'd recommend calling. It was life-saving for me. I think I could've completely broken down on the phone, and still the person would've stayed and listened. Because they know they might be our "last line of defense."

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Karim

MY NAME IS KARIM. I'M 45 YEARS OLD. I'M WHAT PEOPLE CALL A "HARD WORKER."

After a career change, I'm now an auto mechanic, self-employed for the past 5 years. I have a lot of clients and loads of work.

That's actually one of the things my wife reproaches me for: not enjoying life, working too much. Over time, I felt an incompatibility growing between us. It's been six months now that we don't really understand each other anymore; we don't talk, and things get worse day by day. I'm a reserved guy. I talk when it's necessary, but I'm not the kind of person who's going to go around telling his life to everyone.

That night, I was shattered. I didn't know any more if it was over between us or not. I just wanted to forget everything that had happened that day, because it was horrible. I had already attempted suicide sometime ago, and I had promised my son I wouldn't do it again. My wife had remained indifferent to that act. Since then, we talked even less. At the hospital, I was able to open up to two nurses, and that really helped. They had really understood what was weighing on my heart. So I looked for a number to talk again. Because it's easier for me to talk to strangers.

My brother passed away suddenly, and I miss him; especially during times like this. My parents are too old. I don't want to worry them. My buddies are great, but I don't want to feel like I'm betraying my wife by talking to them about our problems.

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I searched online because I really needed to talk to someone. I found the 3114 number right away.

It was nighttime and I couldn't sleep. I dialed the number, and a woman picked up. I talked about my problems, and she knew how to listen to me, to really hear me. Even to reassure me. She really tried to get to the bottom of things by asking me lots of questions. I've called back three or four times since then and I've spoken with different people. Most of them found the right words to get me to engage in the conversation. I have to say, it worked pretty well.

Oh, I still have a long road ahead! For myself personally and for my relationship. For sure, 3114 doesn't have a magic wand! They're not the ones who are going to fix our problems. They guide us, lift our spirits, and it's up to us to take the next step. But talking about it helps you open your eyes to certain things you hadn't really especially noticed before.

Even if you're 2 meters and weigh 150 kilos, you still have the right to feel miserable. And you have the right to get help. So go for it, don't hesitate to call. When you've got the flu, you go see a doctor. At 3114, they're professionals when it comes to suicidal thoughts, so don't hesitate to take that step.

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Pierre

MY NAME IS PIERRE. I'M 53 YEARS OLD.

I've been a police officer for 31 years.

I've been on sick leave for almost 10 months now. I've been carrying a lot of heavy things for several years: colleagues who died by suicide (I even found the body of one of them); a breakup with my partner; and a strained relationship with my son, whom I hardly see anymore.

Gradually, I felt myself falling apart. You keep telling yourself, "You'll hold on, you'll hold on," but... no, it's not true.

The time I called 3114, I'd had an extremely bad day. That night, completely worn out, I collapsed. Literally. I could see the whole scenario of my suicide unfolding.

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Then I said to myself, "You need help. You really have to do something."

I didn't want to call my family, so I searched online. I was lost and in a fog. On my computer, I think I typed something like "suicide SOS help," something like that, and I saw there was the 3114. So I called right away, because I knew I was in a very unstable an emotional state to be able to trust myself. I was put on hold; so I waited... I would've liked to have someone immediately.

While I was waiting, I was stressed and crying. I was also scared of getting someone who would judge me. I kept thinking, "It's not very glorious to be here at your age!"

A man picked up. Florian. I mention his name because I want him to know that talking to him at that moment really helped ease the pressure. He listened. He didn't judge. I was able to tell him what was on my heart.

It's very hard to say "Help," to ask for support. Especially for a man of my generation. But I felt that to him, I wasn't just another caller or a case number. I felt less alone. I didn't want to be hospitalized, and he heard that. So together, we looked for solutions.

Since then, I've been getting very close follow-up at the mental health center with a nurse. Of course, I'm not back to full strength yet, but I'm doing better.

So to anyone who's in need, I want to say: even if it feels impossible, even if you can't imagine a future anymore, you might as well give it a try! One call cost nothing.

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Younes

MY NAME IS YOUNES, I'M 32. RIGHT NOW, I'M UNEMPLOYED, BUT I USED TO WORK AS A SPORTS EDUCATOR.

Work stresses me out. I suffer with obsessive compulsive disorder - OCD - and I regularly experience severe anxiety attacks. It creates tensions at work. As a result, I've been fired several times. But being unemployed has ruined my life. I had to move back in with my mother, and I feel ashamed about it. On weekends, I drink a lot and use dangerous substances. It puts me in an altered state that's destroying me. It's like a form of suicide, just not in a direct way.

I first heard about 3114 when I created a LinkedIn profile to build my professional network. Several therapists were promoting it. At a time point, when I was really unwell, I felt the urge to call. I didn't have specific suicidal thoughts, but I was in the middle of a severe anxiety crisis, and I was scared I'd lose control. I felt like I was trapped in this huge machine - desperate, powerless, and with no way out. I was terrified. I felt like I was going insane.

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The truth is, I needed to ask for help, so I called 3114.

I got through to a psychologist who was amazing. Slowly, I started to feel reassured, to come back to reality. It really helped to be guided by her. We talked for a long time, and it was a genuinely meaningful conversation. With her, I was able to spot solutions, opportunities that are hard to see when everything feels so overwhelming.

I've called back afterward. Twice, actually. But it felt less spontaneous because I started thinking maybe someone else needs this more than I do, and I didn't want to clog up the lines. Once, I got through to a nurse in Montpellier. He really coached me in a positive way. It gave me back a bit of hope in a time full of disillusionment. In some way, it allowed me to dream again. I felt like I mattered. I could sense the trust he placed in me - and that gave me energy and motivation.

Today, I still worry about my work situation, my future, and the insecurity of living at my mother's place. As a man, it's complicated to talk about this. Men don't talk about their pain with each other. When we do, we're quickly pushed aside. You get excluded as soon as you open up about mental health problems. It's taboo. The times I've talked about my OCD with women I've dated, I felt them pull away - as if I no longer fit the image of a confident, reassuring man. When I do talk about it, people label me as depressed or schizophrenic, because those are the only mental health conditions they've heard of. It's stigmatizing. If you live with a mental health disorder, you're seen as weak because as they say, you're not performing enough. Gradually, you put yourself down, you feel worthless, you feel ashamed for not being 'normal,' for not being able to fit in.

If tomorrow someone came to me and said, "Listen, I'm not okay, I don't know what to do," I'd recommend calling. It was life-saving for me. I think I could've completely broken down on the phone, and still the person would've stayed and listened. Because they know they might be our "last line of defense."