

2026 Prevention Not Reaction

You Don't Have to Carry it Alone

Notes for National Suicide Prevention Month

Every September, the calendar hands us National Suicide Prevention Month, and every September I find myself wanting to say something more useful than the usual reminders. So this year I want to talk about a specific thread running under so much of the pain I sit with in session: isolation — and, more specifically, the particular, quiet isolation that comes from living between cultures.

Suicide is rarely about wanting life to end. More often, it's about wanting unbearable pain to end, and not being able to see, or reach, another way through. That distinction matters, because it points us toward what actually helps: connection, and the belief that reaching out is safe.

You can live in Tokyo, surrounded by 37 million people, and still be profoundly isolated — because the language you grieve in isn't the language spoken at the convenience store, because your extended family is nine time zones away, because the friend who would have noticed you'd gone quiet moved back home last year. For the international community here, and for many Japanese nationals navigating their own cultural expectations around self-reliance and not burdening others, that gap between being surrounded by people and actually being connected to them is where risk quietly grows.

THE SIGNS WORTH NOTICING

Withdrawing from people or activities that used to matter. Talking about being a burden, or about there being no way out. A sudden, unexplained calm after a period of visible despair. Giving away belongings, or tying up loose ends. None of these guarantee anything on their own — but together, or paired with a gut feeling that “something is off,” they're worth taking seriously.

2026 *Prevention Not Reaction*

WHAT YOU CAN ACTUALLY DO

- 1. Ask directly.** “Are you thinking about suicide?” does not plant the idea — the research on this is consistent and clear. What it does is tell the other person that this topic is not too frightening for you to hold with them.
 - 2. Listen more than you advise.** You don't need the right words. You need to stay present while they say the hard thing out loud, without rushing to fix, minimize, or reassure it away.
 - 3. Don't leave them alone in a crisis.** If someone is in immediate danger, stay with them, remove access to lethal means where you safely can, and get them to emergency care.
 - 4. Help them get to professional support** — and go with them if that first step feels too big. A referral, a phone number, or an offer to sit with them while they make the call can be the difference between “I should” and “I did.”
- Connection is not a nice-to-have around suicide prevention. It is the intervention.



WHY OUR GROWING TEAM MATTERS HERE

This is also part of why we've been intentionally expanding who sits at the Kintsugi table. In the coming months we'll be welcoming two new clinicians into the practice. One will focus her work on children and families. She has spent the better part of a decade building a life in Japan as a foreign resident herself, and is fluent in English, Japanese, and Spanish. Her path here runs through nonprofit work in Peru, years teaching in a Tokyo classroom, and now graduate training in mental health counseling — all of which she brings into a practice that weaves art, social-emotional learning, and a lifespan-development lens into work with kids navigating identity, transition, and belonging across cultures.

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The other brings particular expertise in the cross-cultural stress faced by the Malaysian community and other diaspora populations navigating life far from home. Both work from a client-centered approach built around the same idea underneath everything in this newsletter: that healing happens when someone feels truly seen, and that a sense of love and belonging isn't a bonus outcome of therapy — it's often the mechanism of it.

The net of care here is widening here, in languages and lived experiences that mirror more of the community we serve. If isolation is part of what's weighing on you, or on someone you love, please don't wait for a formal introduction to reach out. That's exactly what we're here for.

With warmth,
Dr. Abbey-Robin Durkin, PhD

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If you or someone you know is struggling right now

TELL Lifeline (English) — 0800-300-8355 (toll-free) or 03-5774-0992. Sat 9:00–Mon 23:00 continuous, Tue–Thu 9:00–23:00, Fri 9:00–02:00.

Yorisoi Hotline (multilingual, 10 languages) — 0120-279-338, daily 10:00–22:00.

Emergency — Police 110, Ambulance/Fire 119. Please stay on the line until help arrives.

Kintsugi Consulting — reach out any time at kintsugiconsulting.net — we will help you find the right next step, even if that step isn't with us.