

Many survivors carry a question they can barely put into words. The person they lost was one room over, the house was quiet, and nothing registered as a warning. Dr. Richard Heckler spent years interviewing people who survived suicide attempts and described what he found as the suicidal trance. This handout draws on his work and on current research to help survivors understand what may have been happening in the final hours.

What the Suicidal Trance Is

- In his book Waking Up, Alive, Heckler described the trance as a state of total enclosure drawn from interviews with people who survived attempts. The mind perceives only one exit from unbearable pain, and the thinking feels completely logical, not confused.
- Heckler also described a preceding descent: unaddressed pain, withdrawal, and a convincing facade that presents as functioning while the interior crisis deepens. Survivors often recognize this in retrospect.
- The Alliance of Hope summarizes the key finding: in the final stages, the person is no longer able to recognize support when it is available. Not unwilling. No longer able.

Ambivalence: Both Parts Were Still There

- Kevin Hines, one of fewer than forty known survivors of a jump from the Golden Gate Bridge, described his crisis not as a decision but as being compelled. The instant his hands left the rail, he felt immediate regret. The part of him that wanted to live was there the whole time.
- Most people in suicidal crisis are deeply ambivalent, not resolved on dying. The trance does not eliminate the will to live. It drowns it out. The person may have been moving toward death while part of them was still reaching for life.
- Crisis intervention is built on this ambivalence. People can be reached because the balance between living and dying is never entirely settled.

Why They May Not Have Called Out

- [Suicide crisis syndrome research](#) found that up to 75 percent of people who died by suicide denied suicidal intent at their last clinical meeting, and between 50 and 60 percent disclosed to no one at all.
- Psychologist Thomas Joiner identified perceived burdensomeness as central to suicidal crisis: the distorted conviction that others would be better off without them. The silence may have been, in an inverted way, a form of protection.
- The most common reasons for non-disclosure were fear of judgment and not wanting to worry the people they cared for.

The Pre-Suicidal Calm

- When internal conflict resolves in the final stage, agitation can lift. The person may seem suddenly lighter or more at peace. Clinicians have documented this pattern for decades.
- It is not recovery. It is the quieting of ambivalence once the decision has, in the person's mind, been made.
- If you carry the memory of a good day right before the end, many survivors carry exactly that. It was real. It just was not what it appeared to be.

What This Means for the Guilt You Carry

- This framework does not answer why the person you lost entered this state. Our post on [why facts never fully answer the question why](#) speaks to what remains unanswerable.
- What it offers is a different way to hold one question: whether the outcome could have changed if you had said the right thing. The [guilt](#) survivors carry deserves time and support.
- The [American Foundation for Suicide Prevention](#) can help you find a suicide loss support group anywhere in the country.

Source

<https://sunflowersaftersuicide.com/suicidal-trance-what-it-means-for-the-questions-you-still-carry/>