

Curbing suicidal thoughts: UW psychologist develops innovative suicide prevention website

By Taylor Jumpa Contributing writer Jun 8, 2019



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The website [NowMattersNow.org](https://www.nowmattersnow.org), an immediate and accessible resource for people experiencing suicidal thoughts created by a UW psychologist, has been found to significantly reduce the intensity of negative emotions in under 10 minutes.

Now Matters Now includes videos of people who have dealt with suicidal ideation and been able to live successful lives sharing their stories and methods they used, specifically dialectical behavior therapy techniques, to overcome severe depression.

“I wanted to be able to make it so these stories were really accessible,” Ursula Whiteside, co-developer of the website and UW clinical psychologist, said. “Not only showing that they survived but how they survived.”

“Dialectical behavior therapy is centered around changing your relationship to your emotions; changing the way you understand, think, and react to them,” Whiteside said. Practicing mindfulness is one of the ways people can do this.

Mindfulness is very applicable to day-to-day life and reducing stress. Mindfulness is the practice of staying in the present and choosing the tasks that you’re going to do instead of allowing your emotions to be in control.

“It provides a framework for you to notice what’s happening and then choose what you want to do with that situation and what you want to be present for and, more importantly, what you want to not be present for,” Whiteside said. The practice of mindfulness is helpful for college students trying to balance school and mental health.

Whiteside’s advice to students is to section off time for studying and make clear boundaries between work and break time. In doing so, you’re not having constant and unnecessary stress over school work. It’s important to stick with your schedule, Whiteside said, even if studying is last thing you want to do. Although this is obviously easier said than done, with the combination of other DBT skills, like opposite action, it can be achieved.

“The thing about emotions is they sometimes want you to do things that are not in your best interest and opposite action is a way to do what is in your best interest despite how you feel,” Whiteside said.

To describe opposite action, she gave the analogy that if all you want to do is lay in bed while listening to Billie Eilish you should, instead, dance around your room. When you do the opposite of what your emotions are telling you to do, your emotions start to change to align with your actions.

She shared that the inspiration for Now Matters Now came from when she was an undergraduate. “Being 18, being away from home, and in a situation that’s so overwhelming, I remember feeling so alone,” she said.

Her experience is shared by [many undergraduates](#) at the UW.

“I wanted to create what I didn’t have,” Whiteside said.

Now Matters Now is a useful resource, especially for college students that might feel like they are unable to reach out for help from their school or don't know where to start. Its smartphone accessible, free, and immediate services are breaking barriers in front of mental health care.

"We know that most people that die by suicide do not reach out for mental health care," Whiteside said. Additionally, there are 10 million people in the United States that seriously consider suicide every year and only 600,000 mental health care professionals, according to the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics. These alarming numbers are why resources like Now Matters Now are becoming increasingly important.

"Mental health is a growing concern nationwide and students are coming to college with higher rates of depression and anxiety," Megan Kennedy, interim special assistant to the vice president of student life, said.

The Counseling Center and Hall Health are working to increase their capacity to be able to support more students. But it is also known that individual counseling from mental health professionals cannot be relied on to solve the problem.

"We understand that mental health is a multifaceted topic that requires a multifaceted approach," Kennedy said. Hall Health and the Counseling Center have been collaborated on the program [Let's Talk](#), a nontraditional form of counseling that is free and accessible.

Kennedy also shared that a new website, designed specifically for UW students with information on mental health and resources, including Now Matters Now, available [here](#).

"We're working together as a campus to be able to support students' mental health and well-being," Kennedy said. "We understand that the more we can collaborate, the better we'll be able to support students health and well being."

If you are in need of help, you can also contact the following free and 24/7 resources below:

[National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255](#)

[Crisis Text Line: Text HOME to 741741](#)

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