

circles of connection

LGBTIQA+ LIVED EXPERIENCE
SUGGESTIONS TO TRY WHEN
YOU'RE THINKING OF SUICIDE



switchboard



charlee



CHANGING
THE LANDSCAPE



Help, hope and purpose

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

This resource was created by settlers on the lands of many nations across this continent, including the Wurundjeri Woiwurrung people and Boonwurrung people of the Kulin Nation, the Whadjuk people of the Noongar Nation, the Gubbi Gubbi/Kabi Kabi people, and the Palawa people.

We acknowledge that both locally and nationally, Switchboard Victoria's work takes place on stolen lands under ongoing colonial occupation. We pay our deepest respects to all Elders past and present and extend those respects to all Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples. We recognise that sovereignty was never ceded, and this always was and always will be Aboriginal land.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities hold deep knowledge about suicide as one of the many painful impacts of ongoing colonisation and genocide. We acknowledge the multitude of ways that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have found to resist and survive, and are deeply grateful for how this lived experience wisdom has contributed to our own understandings.

THANK YOU TO...

Our incredible codesign group and facilitators, and the members of Switchboard's Lived Experience Network who offered ideas and suggestions.

The Switchboard Suicide Prevention Program, and other Switchboard staff who offered feedback.

Mind Australia's LGBTIQ+SB Aftercare suicide support program.

Jean, Yorta Yorta, First Nations Lead at Switchboard, through ongoing Relational Accountability backing our work to become culturally safer for Rainbow Mob.

Jacq Moon Studio.

All LGBTIQ+ people with lived experience of suicide. You give so much power, healing, and strength to us, and remind us that we're not alone.

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DEDICATION

To those we have lost to suicide. Even though you're no longer here, we still feel your presence, and you help us grow.

WHAT IS THIS RESOURCE?

If you're reading this, chances are you're someone who knows something about suicide.

You might be...

Looking for something to support you with suicidal distress right now

Preparing for the next time suicide comes up for you or a loved one

Wanting to feel connected with others who also know things about suicide

Supporting someone who has thoughts of suicide

Or anything else.

WHATEVER YOU'RE LOOKING FOR, YOU ARE WELCOME HERE.

This resource was created by a group of LGBTIQ+ people with lived experience of suicide. We've been through it, (and many of us continue to go through it), and have found ways to survive. When we got together to talk about our experiences, we found that many of our strategies were similar, but many were different too. Sharing helped us to feel less alone, and more connected to LGBTIQ+ community.

Making this resource was important to us because we have also struggled to find support. So many of the resources we've seen have been too generic, not queer-friendly, and not based in what it's really like to have thoughts of suicide. We want to be part of changing that.

This resource is a starting point. We know that everyone is different, and that going for a walk, talking to someone, doing art, or any other single suggestion isn't going to help everyone. We want to remind you that if a strategy doesn't work for you, you're not a failure. Even if none of the strategies here are the right fit for you, we hope that reading through them can spark ideas of what might work for you and help you feel less alone.

FEELING DISCONNECTED

For lots of us, suicidal distress comes up when we're feeling disconnected.

'Disconnected' for us has felt like...

Not being in touch with my body and my basic needs.

Struggling to communicate or engage with my loved ones or favourite activities.

Feeling isolated, like I'm not part of my community or communities.

Not knowing where I belong in the world, feeling alone in my experiences.

We have found that our ways of navigating suicidal distress ('our strategies') tend to focus on different types of connection. There is no one strategy that always works to support us in hard times. Instead, we have found many different strategies that we use at different times.

In this zine, we've collected some of our strategies and arranged them using a concept called 'Circles of connection'.



CIRCLES OF CONNECTION



Circles of connection is a way to figure out which strategies might be useful for us based on **what's going on for us** and **what we need help with**.

As a group, we found that:

- Many of the ideas from the circles overlap.
- Sometimes our experiences fall into more than one circle at once.
- We don't always move through the circles in a straight line. For example, we might start in Circle 4 and then go to Circle 2.
- We might need to use more than one strategy. Sometimes this means combining strategies together (like smelling a scented candle while listening to music), and sometimes this means doing one strategy so we can make it to the next one (like doing some mindful drawing before we can talk to a loved one).
- We might need to adapt some strategies so that they fit our personal context better (because of disability, culture, faith, or other reasons).
- Not every strategy works for us every time, or at all (and that's ok!)



HOW TO USE THIS ZINE

1. Choose which circle or circles you're in right now.
2. Go to the page for that circle and have a look at the strategies, ideas, and links shared.
3. Decide which strategies you'd like to try and test them out.
4. Use the reflection prompts to figure out what worked and what didn't, and add your own strategies.
5. Repeat as needed.

WHICH CIRCLE AM I IN?

To figure out where to start, ask yourself the following questions:

- Which circle best describes my situation? If more than one circle fits, you can:
 - › Choose the smallest one and work your way outwards, or
 - › Choose the circle that matches most closely.
- What do I need help with right now?
- What types of strategies am I most drawn to?



SELF

CIRCLE ONE

WHEN I'M IN CIRCLE 1,
I'M IN CRISIS RIGHT NOW.

I feel disconnected from my body and sense of self. I need something I can do immediately because even 10 minutes in the future feels overwhelming. I need permission to take a moment.

The strategies for circle 1 focus on:

Affirmation, embodiment, grounding, and sensory support.



SURROUNDINGS

CIRCLE TWO

WHEN I'M IN CIRCLE 2, I'M
READY TO GET SUPPORT
FROM PEOPLE AND THINGS
CLOSE TO ME.

I need help with looking after myself and doing simple nurturing activities. I want to connect with my emotions in ways that feel safe.

The strategies for circle 2 focus on:

Comfort, creativity, expression, kin, and nature.



COMMUNITY

CIRCLE THREE

WHEN I'M IN CIRCLE 3. I'M
LOOKING FOR BELONGING.

I need help to feel connected with my communities beyond my nearest kin. I want to be less isolated.

The strategies for circle 3 focus on:

Activities, community, identity, and support.

HISTORY

CIRCLE FOUR

WHEN I'M IN CIRCLE 4. I'M
TRYING TO UNDERSTAND
MY EXPERIENCES.

I need help to identify the histories, cultures, lineages, and movements that my experiences connect me to. I want to feel like part of something bigger.

The strategies for circle 4 focus on: Activism, culture, history, imagining, and spirituality.



CIRCLE ONE

SELF

Circle 1 is all about focusing on ourselves and our immediate needs, and being able to just take a moment. It's about the small things we do for ourselves to manage big and overwhelming feelings of crisis. Often, it's about things we need to do alone before we're ready to ask someone else for help.

In Circle 1, some of us have needed:

- Something I can do right here and now to bring me back to the present
- A sense of safety
- A chance to just be and be in the moment
- Something that calms or resets my nervous system and helps to ground me
- Something that snaps me out of bad thoughts

WHAT DO YOU NEED RIGHT NOW?

CHOOSE WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING BEST DESCRIBES WHAT YOU NEED AND THEN ONE OR MORE OF OUR STRATEGIES TO TRY.

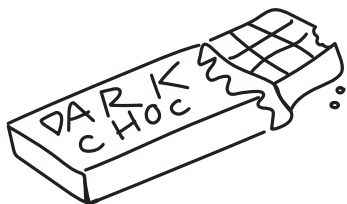


I NEED

I NEED WORDS
THAT WILL HELP
ME GET THROUGH
THIS MOMENT AND
BRING ME BACK TO
MYSELF.



I NEED ACTIVITIES
THAT WILL HELP
ME TO CONNECT
MY BODY



I WILL TRY

AFFIRMATIONS

- * 'I am worthy. I am valued. I am love and I am loved. Everything is okay. One step, one breath. You got this. I believe in you. I am so proud of you.'
- * 'I am here. I am safe. Take it one moment at a time and just be here now.'
- * 'This feeling can't last forever.'

BODY-BASED STRATEGIES

- * Deep breathing and stretching to reconnect with my body.
- * Eating bitter dark chocolate.
- * Humming songs to myself.
- * Nap or sleep.
- * Self-massage around stomach, neck, and face.
- * Wall squats.

I NEED

I NEED EXERCISES THAT WILL BRING ME BACK TO THE PRESENT



I WILL TRY

GROUNDING STRATEGIES

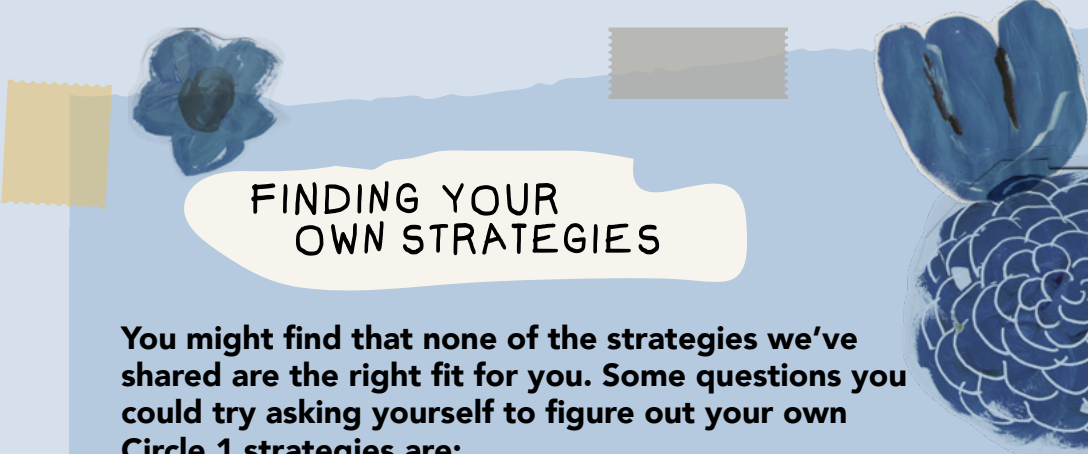
- * Bath or shower and letting the water ground me or slow me.
- * Focus on a candle flame, or sunset, or the moon and stars.
- * Listen to music and breathe.
- * Progressive muscle relaxation – tensing and relaxing each muscle, starting with my toes and working my way up to my head.
- * Using my senses to name 5 things I can see. 4 things I can touch. 3 things I can hear. 2 things I can smell. 1 thing I can taste.

I NEED SENSATIONS THAT WILL CALM MY NERVOUS SYSTEM



SENSORY SUPPORT STRATEGIES

- * Cold water or ice on my temples/forehead/neck.
- * Lighting a scented candle, or smell something nice (particularly citrus scent).
- * Stimming (vocal stims like singing, or movements like swaying, clenching and releasing fists).
- * Sitting on the couch with a really soft blanket over me.
- * Swinging my arms, rocking, hugging myself.
- * Tapping with fingers (like drumming).
- * Using a sound reduction headset/earplugs.
- * Using a weighted blanket or cold/warm face compress or sleep mask after a bath.

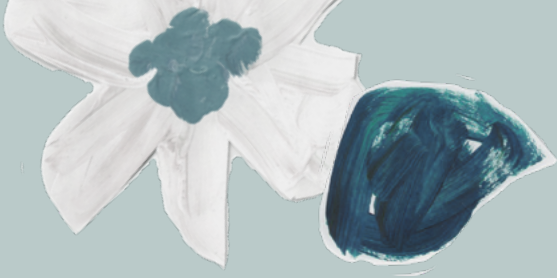


FINDING YOUR OWN STRATEGIES

You might find that none of the strategies we've shared are the right fit for you. Some questions you could try asking yourself to figure out your own Circle 1 strategies are:

- What small, everyday things help me feel safe in my body?
- What does 'taking a moment' look like to me?
- When I'm checked out or disconnected from what's happening right now, what brings me back?



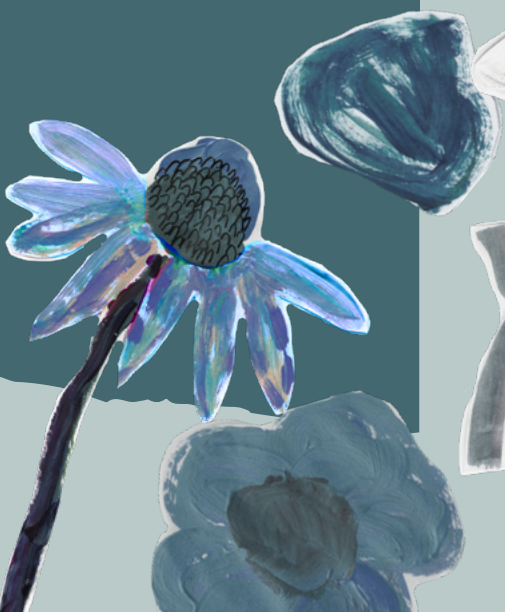


CIRCLE TWO

SURROUNDINGS

Circle 2 is about getting support from what's closest to us. This might mean things that are physically or emotionally close to us, like people, animals, or belongings. Or it might mean things that are important to us, like creative activities, nature, or a treasured book, TV show, or video game. In Circle 2, we're often ready to try talking about what's going on for us.

In Circle 2, some of us have needed:

- Connection to self and others, loved ones past and present
 - Playfulness and joy
 - Co-regulating with others
 - To communicate my needs however I can
 - To get the emotions out of my body
 - Help with distraction or a shift in mood
 - To come back to what 'rings true' for me
- 

WHAT DO YOU NEED RIGHT NOW?



CHOOSE WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING BEST DESCRIBES WHAT YOU NEED AND THEN ONE OR MORE OF OUR STRATEGIES TO TRY.

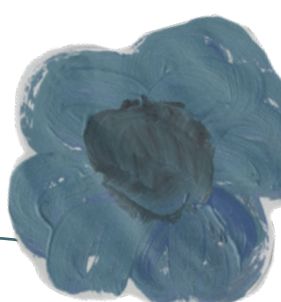
I NEED

I WILL TRY

I NEED
ACTIVITIES
THAT ENGAGE
MY BODY
AND MIND

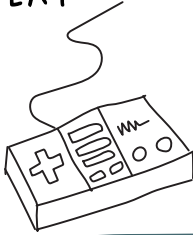


CREATIVITY

- * Additions to my trinket collections of things in life that inspired me or made me smile (bird feathers, rocks, cool shells, crystals, etc).
 - * Crochet - tactile things help me in times of distress.
 - * Designing or reviewing portfolios for potential body mods.
 - * Draw. Try to practice mindful drawing.
 - * Eating a tasty meal that I have prepared using natural unprocessed ingredients.
 - * Go to gym and dance with my music like no one is watching :)
 - * I like to tinker with electronic components. I get to use my maths skills.
 - * Listen to music. Depends on my mood. Classical piano music, solfeggio frequency, metal.
 - * Painting, sketching, journalling, reading books.
 - * Playing a musical instrument.
 - * Solo karaoke sessions. Singing is so healing.
- 

I NEED

I NEED SOOTHING DISTRACTION. AND / OR TO PLAY



I WILL TRY

COMFORT

- * Blanket cocoons and pillow forts, cuddling plushies.
- * Doing activities I enjoyed as a kid – stepping outside of 'adult' expectations.
- * My favourite video game.
- * Spend time in a dark, quiet room patting my dog.
- * Watching something silly on TV, watching a comfort show.

I NEED TO SHARE WHAT'S GOING ON FOR ME



EXPRESSION

- * Express my emotions as they need to be expressed and communicate small needs even if it's one word like "shower".
- * Sending a voice note to my partner or a close friend.
- * Write down my thoughts and feelings on paper and then throw it away/get rid of it.
- * Writing poems, my own lyrics to published songs.

I NEED SUPPORT FROM PEOPLE I AM CLOSE TO



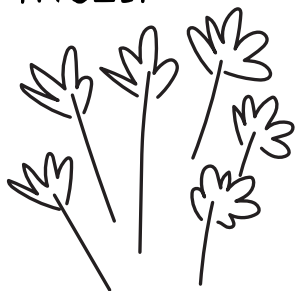
KIN

- * Call and check in with a friend.
- * Cuddle with cat, dogs, or stuffed animal tbh.
- * Intimate contact with someone I trust – whatever that looks like for me in the moment.
- * Seeing trusted friends.
- * Sharing comfortable silence.
- * Sometimes even looking at photographs or little trinkets from loved ones helps me.



I NEED

I NEED CONNECTION WITH SOMETHING OUTSIDE OF MYSELF



I WILL TRY

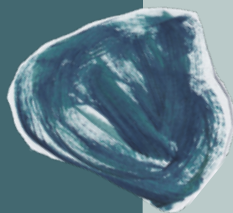
NATURE

- * A walk in the bush near a river near me.
- * Being near water (especially the beach).
- * Driving through the hills with the windows down for the fresh air of nature, listening to soft music.
- * Finding rare shells. Empowers my sense of wonder.
- * Go for a walk in nature.
- * Of a nighttime, sit and look at the stars.
- * Spend time in nature (local park or community area/wildflower gardens).

FINDING YOUR OWN STRATEGIES

You might find that none of the strategies we've shared are the right fit for you. Some questions you could try asking yourself to figure out your own Circle 2 strategies are:

- Who or what is nearby right now that might support me?
- What brings me comfort?
- What activities are playful to me or bring me joy?
- How can I express my feelings in a way that is safe for me?
- What creative activities help me to feel connected with my whole self?





CIRCLE THREE

COMMUNITY

Circle 3 is about expanding our connections outside of what's closest to us, and connecting to our communities. Many of us are part of more than one community: we might be part of an LGBTQIA+ community, a local community based on where we live, a cultural or faith community, a community related to our hobbies or activities, a lived experience of suicide community, or any other type of community.

In Circle 3, some of us have needed:

- Opening up the world beyond the claustrophobic limitations I feel
- Understanding through shared experience
- Queer joy and gender euphoria
- A feeling of achievement and focus... even doing half of something makes me feel accomplished enough to do other things
- Opening places where I have been blocked



WHAT DO YOU NEED RIGHT NOW?

CHOOSE WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING BEST DESCRIBES WHAT YOU NEED AND THEN ONE OR MORE OF OUR STRATEGIES TO TRY.



I NEED

I NEED
ACTIVITIES
I CAN DO WITH
OTHER PEOPLE



I NEED TO
PARTICIPATE
IN SOMETHING
THAT HELPS
MY COMMUNITIES

I WILL TRY

ACTIVITIES

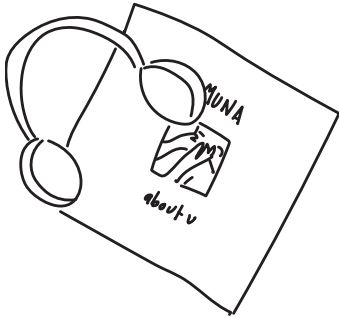
- * Attending a queer film festival.
- * Doing a workshop or class related to one of my hobbies.
- * Going for a hike somewhere far from the city with friends.
- * Going to a trans and gender diverse book club.
- * Singing in a group (with friends or in a local choir).

COMMUNITY

- * Caring for Country or looking after my local environment (by cleaning up a local waterway with a Friends of the Creek group, volunteering with a wildlife rescue, or planting native plants in my garden).
- * Codesign projects and advocacy work.
- * Sharing my lived experience story.
- * Taking part in a community cooking project (like Food Not Bombs, community Iftar cooking sessions, or cooking for Spring Festival).
- * Volunteering with an LGBTIQ+ organisation.

I NEED

I NEED TO CONNECT WITH MY LGBTIQ+ IDENTITY AND COMMUNITY



I WILL TRY

IDENTITY

- * Contacting queer* friends and colleagues and asking what they did and how they approached developing a positive sense of self.
- * Experimenting with clothes, hairstyles, cologne/perfume, jewellery that help me express my identity.
- * Listening to music by queer artists.
- * Putting symbols and imagery of positive queer identity in my living space (e.g. queer artwork).
- * Reading fiction by and for queer audiences.
- * Wearing gender affirming clothes like binders and compression garments.

**We know that not every LGBTIQ+ person uses the word queer, for many different reasons. We're using 'queer' here because it's the best fit for us as codesign participants.*



I NEED

I NEED FORMAL
SUPPORT THAT
CENTRES MY
NEEDS AND LIVED
EXPERIENCE



I WILL TRY

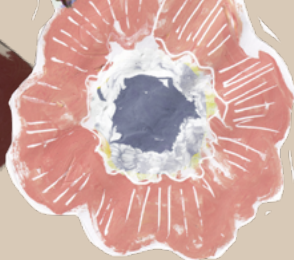
SUPPORT

- * Alternatives To Suicide peer support groups.
- * Calling QLife.
- * Getting support from Mind Australia's LGBTIQ+SB Aftercare suicide support program
- * PARC (Prevention and Recovery Care) and other step-up/step-down programs that help me avoid reaching the point of needing to go to hospital.
- * Roses in the Ocean 'My Self Care Plan' resource.

FINDING YOUR OWN STRATEGIES

You might find that none of the strategies we've shared are the right fit for you. Some questions you could try asking yourself to figure out your own Circle 3 strategies are:

- What communities am I part of?
- What activities help me to feel connected to my communities?
- Are there ways that helping others also helps me?
- Are there ways of connecting with my LGBTIQA+ identity that feel supportive to me?
- Are there services I have found supportive in the past and/or would like to try accessing now?



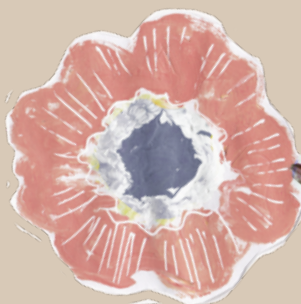
HISTORY

CIRCLE FOUR

Circle 4 is about trying to understand our experiences. For many of us, it feels important to know that we are not alone in our experiences, and that they exist as part of a bigger picture. Many others have felt this way before, and their struggles have paved the way for us.

In Circle 4, some of us have needed:

- Connection to a larger sense of purpose
- A reminder of my values and what's important to me
- Resistance to the idea that we're wrong and our perception is wrong
- To be part of a group of people who are trying to collectively heal
- To understand my experience as natural and to remember that I am part of nature
- To learn from others and share a sense of justice and solidarity



WHAT DO YOU NEED RIGHT NOW?

CHOOSE WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING BEST DESCRIBES WHAT YOU NEED AND THEN ONE OR MORE OF OUR STRATEGIES TO TRY.

I NEED

I NEED STRATEGIES THAT AFFIRM MY CONNECTION TO MY CULTURE/S



I NEED TO IMAGINE OTHER POSSIBILITIES FOR MYSELF AND THE WORLD



I WILL TRY

CULTURES

- *Connecting with Country.
- * Understanding my suicidal distress as being connected to elemental imbalance, and using Tibetan medicine to support me.
- * Rejection of assimilation (living culture outside accepted or expected norms).
- * Wisdom beyond language (precolonial teachings in stewardship, care, and connected self).

IMAGINING

- * Connecting with and seeing myself in natural diversity - e.g. animals that change sex, don't fit human ideas of male/female binaries, camouflage their sex, or have same-sex relationships.
- * Imagining transporting myself to parallel universes, alternative realities, and alternative worlds and timelines where impossibility is possible.
- * Thinking about self/identity as a process of multiple evolutions and different ways of being across different times and different contexts.

I NEED

I WILL TRY

I NEED TO BE
PART OF
MAKING
CHANGE

TRANS
RIGHTS
ARE
HUMAN
RIGHTS

ACTIVISM

- * Being visible to queer folx who are on their path to self-awakening and recognition.
- * Doing community and informal peer support, caring practices, and collective care.
- * Fostering values change in others by challenging their perspectives, educating, being unapologetic.
- * Generational change - being part of collective healing by working to create safety and healing for myself, to build and leave a better legacy.
- * Going to protests and rallies.
- * Learning from others in inpatient care and supporting each other.
- * Reframing suicide by putting it in a socio-political-cultural context and acknowledging the ways it is connected to experiences of discrimination and oppression.

I NEED TO
FEEL
CONNECTED
WITH SOMETHING
BIGGER THAN
MYSELF

SPIRITUALITY

- * Connecting to spiritual practice/meditation in community.
- * Making offerings on my little shrine.
- * Putting a ribbon or rope around a tree as a transfer of energy – a ritualistic act of transferring knowledge and experiences into a safe vessel.

I NEED

I NEED TO
LEARN HOW
OTHERS MADE
IT THROUGH
HARD TIMES



I WILL TRY

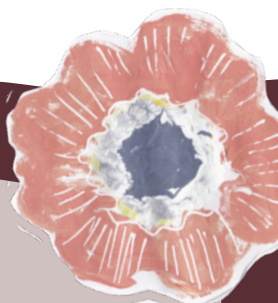
HISTORY

- * Connecting to trans history and important figures like Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson.
Getting to know/learning about local queer elders from Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand.
- * Learning about my family history, talking to parents and grandparents about their experiences.
- * Learning about the psychiatric survivor movement.
- * Reading about Stoicism and the teachings of Marcus Aurelius, Seneca, and Titus.
- * Reading work by LGBTQIA+ journalists and spokespeople.

FINDING YOUR OWN STRATEGIES

You might find that none of the strategies we've shared are the right fit for you. Some questions you could try asking yourself to figure out your own Circle 4 strategies are:

- What do my experiences connect me to? Who has been here before?
- What stories of strength might others have to share?
- Are there practices from my culture/s that might support me? Are there practices that have supported others going through hard times?
- What else could be possible? What are my big dreams for the world?
- What does connecting with something bigger than myself look like to me?





REFLECTION SPACE

When you're ready, take some time to reflect on the strategies you have tried. You could use these questions, or write your own:

- What did these strategies offer me?
- What strategies worked for me? What strategies didn't work?
- Are there strategies I want to come back to another time?
- Are there ways I want to adapt these strategies to better reflect my culture, faith, family background, or other parts of my lived experience?
- How do my personal circles fit together? Are they in a different order? Are they different shapes, or sizes? Are there other circles I'd like to add?
- Where am I now? (Am I still in one of the circles? If so, which one?)



WHERE TO FROM HERE?

Thank you for reading our zine! We hope that you found something that felt supportive – even if it was just one word or idea. Please come back to this resource whenever you need or want to, and please keep building on these ideas. We wrote this with a dream that it could be a resource for our communities that could be personalised and evolve to fit many different needs. We hope that in the future there will be Rainbow Mob and QTIBPoC versions, disability-specific versions, and more.

We imagine physical copies of this zine covered in notes and drawings... digital copies passed around through emails, Discord servers, and chat groups... notebooks and post-its and voice memos... and all sorts of ways of recording and sharing this information.

Our community knowledge about getting through hard times is alive and growing. Thank you for being part of it with us.

If you'd like to share something you came up with based on this zine, or something that got you through your own experiences of suicidal distress, you can email us at **livedexperiencenetwork@switchboard.org.au**



