



**THE SOUTH AFRICAN
DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY GROUP**

SADAG	011 262 6396
Suicide Crisis Line	0800 567 567
Pharmadynamics Trauma Line	0800 20 50 26
AstraZeneca Bipolar Helpline	0800 70 80 90
Sanofi Aventis Sleeping Disorder Helpline	0800 753 379
Substance Abuse Helpline	0800 12 13 14
Dr Reddy's Mental Health Helpline	0800 21 22 23
Support Group Helpline	0800 20 51 21

Website: www.sadag.org • Email: zane1@hargray.com • SMS: 31303

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Facebook and SADAG - a powerful team for Suicide Prevention in SA

Launch coincides with Teen Suicide Prevention Week 12th - 19th February 2012

In 2011, Facebook launched a new suicide prevention tool, giving users a direct link to online help from counsellors. "The safety of the people who use Facebook is of paramount importance to us, and we hope that by partnering with safety organisations around the world we can best provide the help our users need," says Facebook International Communications Director Debbie Frost.

"Friends who are concerned about a loved one are able to report suicidal behaviour by clicking the report links next to any piece of content on the site and choosing suicidal content under the harmful behaviour option," says Facebook spokesman Frederic Wolens. "Facebook then emails the user in distress with resources and information about the South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG) - for users in South Africa." This service is now open to South African Facebook users with links to the SADAG website www.sadag.org, and toll-free crisis line (0800 567 567).

Social media is the way millions of people connect and reach out to each other. Every day, people across the world log on to Facebook, update their statuses, upload their latest pictures and stories – and often seek help and advice. More than 800 million people worldwide use Facebook. Suicide is a growing problem globally and an increasing number of people are turning to their Facebook friends for help.

Facebook has responded to this need with the creation of the dedicated suicide prevention escalation channels, which connect users to crisis intervention and counselling services, and provide tips on identifying a suicidal friend and how to get them help. Now, South Africa's leading mental health NGO has joined the cyberspace cause to prevent suicide. "By partnering with SADAG we can help those in need when they are most at risk. This partnership will undoubtedly make our reporting system, with its over 800 million members, even more effective," says Facebook's Debbie Frost.

The new tool gives people who may not be comfortable initially picking up the phone, a direct avenue to seek help. Worried friends who report the distraught postings on Facebook can trigger an alert that encourages a user to call a counsellor. They will also receive a message to say it is being addressed. Facebook users can also use the social media site to find a suicide hotline, as well as resources for identifying and helping a friend who may be suicidal. All reporting on the site is done anonymously and so a distressed user won't know who reported the suicidal content. "If a user comes across potentially suicidal content on the site, they can report this to us through our "Report Suicidal Content" contact form or by using the "Report" link that appears near the content itself. From there, we review the content, message the potentially suicidal user with the relevant suicide prevention agency's information (in South Africa, this will be SADAG), and escalate to the relevant agency," says Facebook's Erin Kennedy. These reports are considered high priority and are monitored 7 days a week.

SADAG, which runs South Africa's only toll-free suicide crisis line, also has a [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/sadag) page and a very busy website (<http://www.sadag.org/>). They know how great the need is for online help. "People who are feeling like there is no hope or feeling suicidal may go online for help first," says SADAG's founder Zane Wilson. "Being part of the Suicide Prevention Agency network means that people needing someone to talk to can connect with us very quickly." "We know how important it is to be available very swiftly and that suicidal feelings aren't only experienced during office hours," says Wilson. Currently, SADAG's call centre closes at 8pm, with emergency numbers available thereafter.

Suicide rates in South Africa are on the increase, with an estimated 23 people committing suicide daily and about 230 attempted suicides every day, according to leading suicidologist Professor Lourens Schlebusch. "Depression is still a 'taboo' subject and people who are suffering from depression or who feel isolated and alone, often struggle to admit how they're feeling or ask for help because of fear of how others will treat them." Says Wilson. SADAG feels this initiative will have a great impact on getting assistance to people in distress. "People often don't know how to cope or where to turn for help," says Wilson. "Being able to have nationwide access to our counsellors and to receive speedy help for you, a friend or even a stranger who is in distress on Facebook will greatly contribute to decreasing the number of suicide attempts in South Africa."

With more and more reported cases of suicide intentions aired online, it's time we turn to cyberspace for critical prevention. Social media is a very powerful force in providing an outlet and support for people in crisis. "We have to work together to provide information and resources to people in crisis," says Wilson. "That's why being part of the Facebook initiative is so valuable." People who are thinking about suicide and let their intention be known online are reaching out for help. Let them know you care, that you don't judge their thoughts or emotions, and be patient - take the time to listen.

For more information, please contact Zane via email zane1@hargray.com or Cassey on 011 262 6396.



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