

Stand-up comedy course for men at risk of suicide

Level 2: Intermediate

1 Warmer

a. These abbreviations are found in the text. What are the missing words?

1. NHS National _____ Service
2. PTSD Post-traumatic _____ disorder
3. ADHD Attention-deficit/hyperactivity _____
4. ICS Integrated Care _____
5. NW North _____
6. GP _____ Practitioner

2 Key words

a. Find the following words in the text. The paragraph numbers are given to help you.

1. a noun meaning *an activity in which one person stands in front of an audience and entertains them by telling jokes* _____ (paragraph 1)
2. an adjective meaning *weak and easy to hurt physically or mentally* _____ (paragraph 1)
3. an adjective meaning *able to quickly become healthy, happy, or strong again after an illness or disappointment* _____ (paragraph 2)
4. an adjective meaning *during the period of time after giving birth* _____ (paragraph 3)
5. a noun meaning *a bad experience that makes you feel very upset, afraid, or shocked often for a long time* _____ (paragraph 4)
6. a noun meaning *a story or an account of something that has happened* _____ (paragraph 5)
7. a noun meaning *a way of thinking about something* _____ (paragraph 6)
8. an adjective meaning *helping to treat or cure illness* _____ (paragraph 7)
9. a noun meaning *the action of deliberately killing yourself* _____ (paragraph 8)

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10. a noun meaning *advice and help that you give someone with their problems, especially as your job* _____ (paragraph 9)
11. a two-word noun phrase meaning *a very small difference between two things* _____ (paragraph 10)
12. a verb meaning *making something happen* _____ (paragraph 10)

Stand-up comedy course for men at risk of suicide wins NHS funding

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9 May, 2022

- 1 Stand-up comedy is often described as one of the most difficult jobs in the world, and many people say they would be too afraid to do it. But a course helping some of the most vulnerable people in the country by teaching them to be comedians is proving so successful that medical practices across the UK are prescribing it.
- 2 "I've taught comedy for ten years, and students often told me how much stronger, more resilient and happier they were after exploring their personal histories through stand-up comedy," said Angie Belcher, founder of Comedy on Referral in Bristol.
- 3 "That inspired me to prove that the models, exercises and games used in a stand-up comedy course can help people to recover from emotional problems such as mental illness, postnatal depression, PTSD and anxiety disorders," she said.
- 4 After completing a very successful six-week NHS course for trauma survivors in Bristol, Comedy on Referral has now won NHS funding to help men at risk of suicide in London. Belcher is also hoping to extend the course to young people with autism and ADHD.
- 5 "My course for trauma victims encourages them to process their trauma in a different way, so they can change who the victim is and choose the narrative. They can start to think, 'This is what I was thinking and then this thing happened to me,'" said Belcher.
- 6 "This enables survivors to consciously use comedy to change their perspective of their experiences, but it also puts them in a physically powerful position because being on stage is very powerful," she said. "You can speak directly to an audience about important things, which means you have the opportunity to change their lives. As a comedian, you could be the reason why someone in your audiences does something differently."
- 7 Belcher's course is the result of a year-long research project on the effects of comedy as a therapeutic device on people's wellbeing and mental health. The course takes participants through the writing, performance and analysis of their personal stories to create a five-minute stand-up comedy set, using games, and group and one-to-one work.
- 8 Recently, Belcher won a grant from the North West London ICS, one of the largest health and care partnerships in the country, to achieve a national 10% reduction in suicides. Belcher will work with psychologists and men who have experienced suicidal events to help up to 20 men aged 18 and over to take part in a comedy event at the end of the course for an audience of at least 100 people.
- 9 "We've never done anything like this before and we're very excited about it because we're hoping it will reach men who, even though they are at high risk of suicide, don't think they have a problem and so won't go to counselling or attend anything called 'suicide prevention'," said Lourdes Colclough, Head of Suicide Prevention at Rethink Mental Illness. "This is a different way of engaging with this hard-to-reach group."
- 10 Belcher said there is a fine line between telling personal stories and triggering former traumas. To prevent this, psychologists support participants during their introduction to therapeutic writing techniques.

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3 Comprehension check

a. Are these statements True (T) or False (F) according to the article? Correct any that are false.

1. Stand-up comedy is one of the easiest jobs in the world.
2. Stand-up comedy enables people to explore their personal histories.
3. The Comedy on Referral course has been treating young people with autism and ADHD.
4. Being on stage puts people in a very powerful position.
5. Comedians can also change the lives of people in the audience.
6. The course is the result of a six-week research project.
7. Participants on the course create a 30-minute stand-up comedy set.
8. A new course will help people who have experienced suicidal events.
9. It is only available to people aged over 18.
10. At least 100 people will attend a comedy event at the beginning of the course.

4 Key language

a. Rearrange the words to make phrases from the text.

1. the one world the most in of jobs difficult
2. physically in powerful position a
3. someone something does reason differently the why
4. research result of a project long the year-
5. engaging different group a of this way with
6. of people least audience an hundred at a

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5 Discussion

a. Discuss these statements.

- “Everyone likes comedy.”
- “Being on stage is easy.”
- “A good sense of humour helps in difficult situations.”

6 In your own words

a. Use the internet to find information about the psychological benefits of humour, laughter, and comedy. Use the questions below to guide you.

- How does laughter benefit physical health?
- What is the impact of humour on reducing physical pain?
- How can laughter improve mental health?
- How can humour and laughter relieve stress? What are some of the long-term and short-term benefits?
- How is dark humour a coping mechanism? Does it really help?

b. Discuss with the class:

- Did you find any of the information surprising?
- Do you personally experience these benefits of laughter, or do you think they are exaggerated?
- Do you think you laugh and joke around enough?