

SUCCESS STORIES

## Hope and Self Care after thoughts of suicide

George experienced a number of life issues that accumulated and built up to a high level of stress anxiety and depression culminating in mental and physical strain. The biggest factor impacting on his situation as expressed by George situation was not having the ability to say 'no' to anything to be done and asked of him as he felt uncomfortable about saying no in case he would let someone down.



[Read more](#) ↓

Introduction This interview was conducted in person with George Graham on a farm setting. George's story relates to a number of life issues that at times led him to thoughts of suicide.

George experienced a number of life issues that accumulated and built up to a high level of stress anxiety and depression culminating in mental and physical strain. The biggest factor impacting on his situation as expressed by George situation was not having the ability to say 'no' to anything to be done and asked of him as he felt uncomfortable about saying no in case he would let someone down.

This left him feeling over awed and overwhelmed and left with feeling that he had no control of his life.

Name of the interviewed	George Graham
Type of farming activity	Mixed Farming and National and International Award-Winning Sheep Shearer:
Mental health issue and affecting factors	Suicide

### What is your story?

At the core of George's story is his struggle with mental health challenges and how he learned to manage it and continues to do so. George stated that at the heart of his story is growing up on a family farm that the main emphasis was on work and getting work done. There was little or no time given to take a day off or to go away for a family holiday. He now believes that this being the situation for him growing up and working on the family farm was unhealthy and not being encouraged to think about self-care contributed to having poor mental health and self-esteem. He did not know what it was to take a day off and enjoy himself. There was no tradition of days off, time for self-care, in fact he said it was almost frowned upon.

George became a successful sheep farmer and learned the skill of sheep shearing. He progressed to becoming a champion sheep shearer at National and International Championships.

He is always in demand for sheep shearing around Ireland. This skill also brought home to work opportunities too Norway. However, George was constantly struggling with his mental health and regularly held thoughts of suicide. "My mind" as George said " was on overtime, just racing here, there, and everywhere. It was just an absolute nightmare, thinking of all these crazy things. I could not stop it, and I could not control it."

Matters came to ahead for him when he was on a Sheep Shearing Contract in Norway upon Before going there, George knew he was not well mentally, `my body was telling me not to go, but I felt I could not say no`, he says.

While he was Norway, he found he was not sleeping properly, eating properly, avoiding company and conversations or talk with people around him .At was at this time he experienced real thoughts of suicide. He was trying to run away from his problems at home in Ireland, - they had come with him, and he could not get them out of his head. He felt he was in a very dark unhealthy place and uncertain how-to manage it so far away from home.

However, he began to think, and he came to the personal understanding while in Norway that could admit to himself that he had a problem, was overworked, neglecting self-care. Deep down he realised that a personal relationship that had not worked out was the trigger or cornerstone of his negative feelings. This realisation brought other issues to the surface. It made him feel very vulnerable, alone, and extremely concerned.

### Handling the situation

While in Norway, he met a Psychiatric Nurse who he befriended to translate for him Through this regular contact he found himself talking to her about his feelings and the issues that were troubling him. This was immensely helpful.

The conversations they had helped break the ice for him and to feel comfortable about opening up about his dark thoughts of suicide.. These conversations became as he said, "my fountain of hope," That lady said to him she would always be there for him. This helped him enormously

George realised it was important to hold on to HOPE, to get home to Ireland to get support and the necessary help

Instead of hiding and trying to run away from the problems and issues that were eating away at him, he realised that he needed to seek support and that this was something he had to do for himself.

At that point of time, he also believed and understood that he required medication. Something which he happily shared he no longer requires. His first point of contact when he got home was to talk to his GP/Family Doctor, who prescribed medication which he found helpful. Going to the Doctor turned things around for him and helped me change the way I was thinking

George explained that now rather than fight a troubling situation and end up sinking low he turned to a number of coping mechanisms which he has put in place for himself. So that when he is not having a good day or feels he is in a dark place he will strive to do something different to diffuse the situation. This could be doing something different such as taking a short car drive, stopping off somewhere to have a cup of tea and or coffee. Contact someone for a hat. Break the silence and the worrying thoughts through distraction

Accessing Mental Health Services helped George as he was being cared for by specially trained nurses, doctors who helped him through his situation. He expressed that it was a traumatic time for him when his that my farm gun was taken from him in his own safety and best interest. It has since been returned to him some time later..

A turning point in his medical professional relationship at a moment of crisis was the day when his Doctor turned to him and said, "Do you think you can get through this situation until Monday?" He provided George with a comfort letter of support in case he felt he could not cope and needed to contact emergency services

That Doctor also put his hand on his shoulder and said, "I know you for a long time, if anything happened to you, I would be broken hearted". These words and kindness and compassion were a heartfelt turning points for George . He felt understood.

### Conclusion and tips

George had to learn about the consequences of having to take medication. Most importantly right now however, he is no longer on medication, but at that time in his life it was very important and got him from A to B

#### Tips to other farmers

"Having conversations about how you are feeling especially when you are in a dark place and having negative thoughts when you need support"

Seek help. Avoid letting the problem build up. Make an appointment to see you GP/Family Doctor as they are an important first point of contact for medical support let it be physical or mental.

Have an annual health check-up at least once a year. It is vital. It can be very reassuring and if there is need for some intervention either physical or mental health it means the problem is sorted sooner rather than later "a stitch in time saves nine"

Other recommendations include:

- take a walk-in nature away from your farm
- meet up with people that cheer you up and put you in a good mood
- reading - articles, books poetry that can inspire, reassure, and uplift your spirits
- listen to the music that you enjoy
- take time out for moments of spirituality - meditate, reflect through personal prayer
- go for a drive, stop off to have a cup of coffee , say Hello to someone, get a conversation going , even if it is only about the e-weather, it helps to break the silence, Who knows but the other person may welcome such an intervention
- finding a safe space to let go talk to someone you trust
- make time for family and friends,

The real message of hope George would like to share is to say that do not try to go it alone, look for help, talk to someone and share your concerns. People are understating and all too willing to help. At such moments you may feel alone, but as George said "I can assure you; you are not alone. put yourself first - it is not being selfish be self-compassionate"

Mental health problems can happen to anyone in any walk of life. Remember you are not the only one experiencing mental health issues, everyone, whether you are a sheep farmer, dairy beef or a sailor, everyone has mental health, and that mental health can be challenged at the most unexpected of times and you owe it to yourself, your quality of life to get the help and support you need,

The most important gift you have in life is Time, and if you are struggling make time for yourself to seek support.

Three especially important considerations pointed out by George :

1. Be safe
2. Peace of Mind
3. Your Health

Combined George believes these three things will help you cross most bridges in life.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Pn4XJoZk84>

<https://thatsfarming.com/farming-news/george-graham-suicide/>

Life and farm work are demanding both for the farmer and the family. The stress and struggles that emerge from this particular workplace setting are unique. It is also well documented that prolonged periods of stress, impact on mental and physical health such as anxiety depression, and heart disease respectively. Such a combination can inevitable lead to serious farm accidents /injuries self-harm and suicide.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), suicidal behaviour is associated with different outcomes and actions with varying degrees of lethality, such as suicidal ideation, attempted suicide, and completed suicide (World Health Organization . Preventing Suicide: A Global Imperative. World Health Organization; Geneva, Switzerland: 2014 and Word Health Organization . World Report on Violence and Health. World Health Organization; Geneva, Switzerland: 2002.).

Suicide in farming within the EU is well documented with France having a high statistic, and in Ireland it has been recorded that almost a quarter (23.4%) of Irish farmers are at risk of taking their own life, according to "stark" research figures released to coincide with Agri Mental Health Week.

The study, funded by the HSE's National Office for Suicide Prevention, was conducted by University College Dublin's School of Agriculture and Food Science, and is based on a series of 10 one-to-one interviews with farmers, four focus groups, including one with industry professionals who deal directly with farmers, and a national survey carried out within the last four months. (<https://www.irishexaminer.com/farming/arid-40982102.html>)

Bereavement by suicide shares many of the characteristics with other bereavements However it is also different.

#### Additional resources:

HUGG - Healing Untold Grief Grouosht<https://www.hugg.ie/surviving-a-suicide/>

"Faced with a sudden, often unexpected, and sometimes violent death, the suicide bereaved experience a grief which typically includes strong feelings of guilt, self-reproach, and questioning - "why?". Discomfort, shame, and self-stigma associated with suicide can make it difficult to talk about. There may be further challenges to face which are not common to "normal" bereavements e.g., inquests, media coverage, trauma reactions and difficult family relationships". Women and Men may experience Grief differently, women are more likely to express their feelings early after loss, reach out for social support, express more sorrow, experience depression, guilt, and they are more willing to talk about the loss.

As noted by EmbraceFARM <https://embracefarm.com/supports/bereavement/>

"Whereas men on the other hand are more likely to take on a managerial role, intellectualise their emotions, indicate feelings of anger, fear and loss of control, they also may use denial or be more private about grief"

The Encircle Programme focus is on assisting the emotional wellbeing of farm families through their loss and in turn with the practical support and information they may require on this journey. <https://embracefarm.com/embrace-supports/encircle/>

◀ READ PREVIOUS STORY  
Positive steps after marriage breakup