INFORMATION REGARDING RESEARCH PROJECT

My name is Braam Hoffinann and I am currently a DPhil-student at the Rand Afrikaans University. The title of my research project is "Collage-facilitated narratives of experiences by late adolescents close to suicide victims - a phenomenological approach". The supervisors of my study are Professors CPH Myburgh and M Poggenpoel of the Faculty of Education and Nursing, Rand Afrikaans University, Johannesburg.

What is this study all about? Suicide - the taking of one's own life - is an irreversible, tragic, mysterious and hidden act which often leaves people baffled, confused and stigmatised. Those who have completed their suicide attempts can no longer be probed about their motives, frame of mind and emotional state leading to the eventual act. Immediately after the suicide, people's thoughts often turn to the person who have committed suicide. Yet, the real victims of this tragedy are the family and friends who are left behind to cope with the loss of a loved one, to struggle with many unanswered questions, self-blaming and often an inability to move on with their lives. The situation is often made more difficult by a society who doesn't allow an open discussion of the suicide and the associated negative emotions towards the dead person - a "conspiracy of silence". The mere fact that suicide is rated among the top ten causes of death in the industrialised world, further highlights the extend of its impact on a relatively large part of the population.

A number of scientific studies have recently focussed on the demographics, causes, risk factors and treatment of suicidal behaviour. However, the problem at present is that little is known regarding the emotional experiences, meaning-making and coping behaviour of those that are left behind after a completed suicide attempt by a close relative/friend. Since the focus is often on the suicide victim, the effects of this act on the psychological coping and functioning of close friends and family members are easily overlooked and neglected. Therefore, this study intends to address the problem by exploring and uncovering the experiences of late adolescents close to suicide victims.

In this study I aim to reach the following three objectives:

- To explore and describe the experiences, meaning-making and coping behaviour of late adolescents after the "suicide of a loved one" from a phenomenological perspective,
To explore and develop the use of collage-facilitated narratives as a creative instrument in phenomenological studies of emotional trauma, and to use the results of the study to develop training programs aimed at adolescents, peer helpers, guardian lecturers, support groups and other professional helpers.

What will you have to do if you are part of the study? I would like to conduct at least one interview with you where I will ask you the following question: "Tell me the story of how you experienced the suicide of someone close to you - for example a good friend or close relative? Also, tell me how you coped or made sense of this experience since it happened?" In order to make it easier to tell me about this experience, I'd like you to make a collage before we meet for the interview. The collage may include anything you like - some examples include the following: personal photos, magazine pictures, drawings, written words or poems. The interview will take as long as you need to tell me about your experience, usually between 30 minutes and 2 hours. It may be followed by a second short interview for clarification. The interview/s will be conducted where and when it is comfortable for both of us.

What benefits will the study have for you and others? The study will give you a chance to talk to someone who is willing to listen to what you have experienced since the unfortunate death of a loved one. Perhaps you have never had a real chance to do something like this, or would just like to share it with me. However, it is difficult to predict whether or not any personal benefit will result. However, this study will definitely have some benefits for other persons. On an academic level, it will help us to better understand how adolescents experience and cope with the trauma of "suicide of a loved one". It will also help us to train and develop guidelines for peer helpers, guardian lecturers, professional counsellors and support groups to help adolescents who have experienced the suicide of a loved one. Lastly, it may help us to give other adolescents some of the necessary life skills to handle such an experience.

Before you decide to be part of this study, I want to draw your attention to a very important issue. In the interview/s you will be sharing emotionally sensitive and intimate details about yourself. This process of self-revelation means that you will have to recall emotions, thoughts and actions regarding your experience which could be traumatic in itself. Therefore, I have made arrangements with a psychologist at the Student Support Services for you to visit free of charge should you need professional therapy.

I would like to give you the following assurances and commitments if you become part of the study:

- Participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to withdraw your consent to participate at any time without having to provide any reason for your decision. Withdrawing your consent will be accepted without any penalty or future disadvantage.
- All the personal information that you provide during the study will be handled confidentially,
which means that access to your data will be strictly limited to myself, the two supervisors of the study and the designated examiners (appointed by the Rand Afrikaans University) of the study. Also, your data and personal information will be kept and stored in a confidential format which will only be accessible to myself.

- Confidentiality of data will be maintained - in other words your identity will only be known to myself. I will remove/mask all identifying data (e.g. names and places) on transcriptions and all report documents (for example the final thesis). Thus, your identity will not be revealed during or after the study, even when the study is published or used in any format.
- If you so wish, I'll be glad to give you feedback regarding the analysis of your data and the overall analysis of the study.
- I am an adequately trained and qualified researcher in the study fields covered by this research project - inter alia in qualitative research and psychology.
- All parts of the study will be conducted according to internationally accepted ethical principles of qualitative research.

I would like to request your permission to do the following during and/or after the study:

- To audio-tape record our interview/s for data analysis.
- To keep the original collage or to make a copy (computer scan, photograph or videotape) of your collage for analysis and inclusion in the final thesis and other presentations of research results.
- To use direct quotations from your transcript/s in the final thesis and other presentations of research results.
- To use the results of the study for publication in reputable scientific journals.
- To use the results of the study in presentations at scientific meetings (congresses) and in training programs.

Do not hesitate to ask any questions about the study either before, during or after participating in the study. I can be contacted on my cellular phone (083 6509917) at any time. Alternatively, you can contact my study leader, Prof Myburgh at Tel No (011) 489-2680 during office hours.

If you are still willing to participate in the study after reading, reflecting and discussing the above with a friend or relative, I'll be glad to hear from you in order to make specific arrangements for the collage and the research interview. I will also expect you to sign an informed consent document as a formal acceptance of the information contained in this information document.