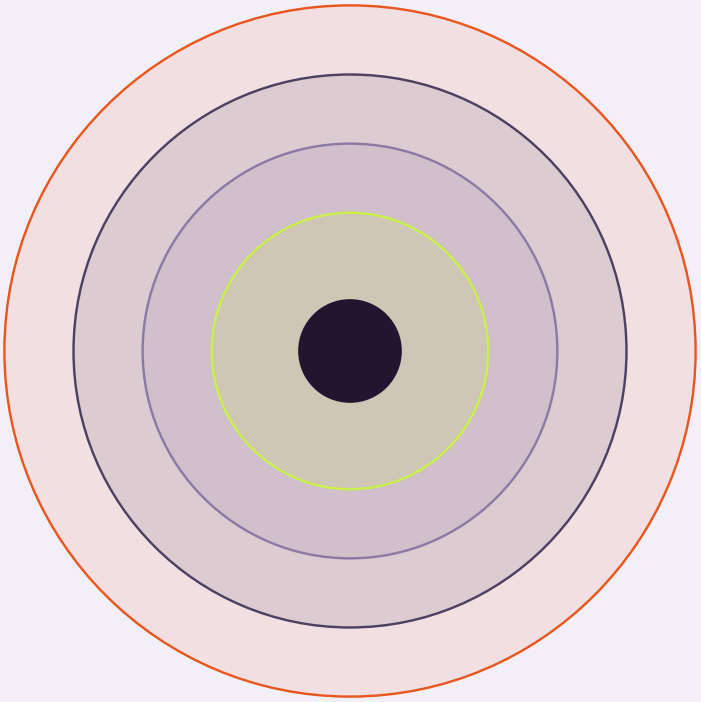


Suicidal Empathy: Dying to Be Kind

A reading of the book by Gad Saad (2026)

1. ACTION BOOK

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ABOUT THIS EDITION

This is HourLife's reading of Suicidal Empathy: Dying to Be Kind, in our own words. It is not a substitute for the book.

BEFORE YOU START 01

The book in a minute

Gad Saad is a Lebanese-born Canadian behavioural scientist who teaches marketing at Concordia University in Montreal and applies evolutionary psychology to human behaviour. In this follow-up to The Parasitic Mind, he argues that empathy is a valuable trait that does harm when it fires too strongly, at the wrong target, or without reason to check it. His name for that failure is suicidal empathy: compassion that ends up hurting the person or the society that shows it. Where his earlier book described bad ideas hijacking how people think, this one describes them hijacking how people feel. He applies the idea to political debates such as immigration, crime, homelessness and gender policy, mostly through news stories and his own experience. The book is a polemic, and many reviewers, including some who share his politics, dispute his examples and his conclusions.

Below are the 9 ideas HourLife readers vote up most, each in our words with a note on what it asks of you, and then the steps that put them to work.

WHAT READERS KEEP

The takeaways

1 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Saad is not against empathy; his case is that it fails the way any good trait fails, by running too hot or aiming at the wrong target.

He describes empathy as an evolved capacity that serves a social species well within a sensible range. The trouble he names is empathy that has come loose from that range. The word suicidal in the title is a metaphor for kindness that harms the one who offers it.

2 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Suicidal empathy is his name for compassion that ends up damaging the person or the society that shows it.

The test he applies is about outcomes: does the kind act leave the giver, or the group, worse off? A feeling can be sincere and still lead to a choice that backfires. You do not need to share his politics to find that distinction useful in your own life.

3 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

The book is a sequel to The Parasitic Mind: there, bad ideas hijack reasoning; here, they hijack feeling.

In the earlier book Saad called certain ideas parasites that disable clear thinking. Here he turns to the emotional side and argues that a strong moral feeling can switch off the questions a person would normally ask. Both books share one aim: to put evidence and reason back in charge.

4 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Feeling what another person feels is not the same as understanding what they think, and Saad argues the second needs more care.

He separates the emotional side of empathy from the cognitive side, which psychologists tie to theory of mind: the ability to model what is in someone else's head. His claim is that people often assume others share their own values and fears. He calls the failure to model a different culture's values a missing cultural theory of mind.

5 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

A kindness should be judged by what it does, not only by how good it feels to offer.

Saad returns again and again to the gap between how a choice feels to support and what it does once it is in place. He argues that public policy is often defended by the warmth of its intentions. The same gap shows up in private life, in the loan that is never repaid or the favour that becomes a duty.

6 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Every kindness has a cost, and Saad argues the cost often lands on someone who is not in the picture.

Many of his examples ask who pays when compassion for one group becomes a rule: neighbours, victims of crime, or the next generation. Critics reply that he picks the cases that suit his conclusion and that the costs he names are contested. Asking who is missing from the frame is still a useful habit for any decision.

7 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Empathy flows most easily to whoever is cast as the victim, which is why Saad sees that label as so powerful in public argument.

In his account, being seen as the victim draws sympathy, so debates turn into contests over who holds that position. He applies this to arguments about crime, migration and gender. His critics note that people on every side of politics make the same move.

8 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Saad writes as someone whose family fled Lebanon's civil war, and he treats an open, stable society as rare and easy to lose.

He argues that the safety and freedoms many readers take for granted are recent and fragile. That history explains the urgency of his tone. Reviewers who disagree with him say the same fear leads him to overstate the threats he describes.

9 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

The remedy the book points to is not less empathy but empathy with reason in charge of it.

Saad's alternative is calibration: keep the feeling, then check it against evidence, consequences and everyone the choice affects. That check works on small, personal decisions as well as public ones. It is also the part of the book that readers on different sides are most likely to share.

PUT IT TO WORK

Your action book

Do the setup steps once, then keep the habits going. The setup changes your week; the habits keep it changed after the first good one.

The download puts this whole reading and a printable action book in one PDF: the setup checklist, then a page of real calendar days for each habit, starting on the day you choose.

SET UP ONCE

- [ ] Write down one kindness that costs you
- [ ] Name the people outside the frame
- [ ] Set your limit before you're asked
- [ ] Read one serious critic
- [ ] Split a strong view into feeling and evidence

KEEP UP DAILY

- ◯ Wait a day on any big yes
- ◯ Ask what happens the tenth time
- ◯ Check results once a month

30 days · Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026

Part two, after the reading, prints each of these as a page to fill in by hand.

THE LAST WORD

Before you go

Pick one step from the action book and do it today. An idea from a book starts to count once it changes what one ordinary day looks like.

PART TWO

The action book

Change the setup once, then keep it up. 5 setup actions to do once, and 3 habits to mark each day for 30 days.

Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026

Print it, or write on it in any PDF app.

SET UP ONCE

The setup checklist

Each of these is done once. Do one a day, and check it off when it is done.

☐ SETUP 1

Write down one kindness that costs you

Pick one ongoing commitment, such as a loan, a favour or a role you keep covering.

On one page, write what it costs you each month and what it actually does for the other person.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

☐ SETUP 2

Name the people outside the frame

Take one decision you face this week and list everyone it affects, not only the person asking.

Put a star next to anyone you had not been picturing.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

☐ SETUP 3

Set your limit before you're asked

Decide now how much money, time or how many second chances you can offer a friend or relative without resentment.

Write the number down so the choice is made while you are calm.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

☐ SETUP 4

Read one serious critic

Before you settle on what you think of this book, read one critical review and one favourable one.

Write down the strongest point each makes.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

☐ SETUP 5

Split a strong view into feeling and evidence

Pick a public issue you feel strongly about.

Write one sentence on what you feel, one on what you believe the evidence shows, and one on where you would check it.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

DAILY HABIT 1 OF 3

Wait a day on any big yes

When someone asks for a large favour, money or a place to stay, say you will answer tomorrow.

Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

November 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
						1
2	3	4	5	6 ○	7 ○	8 ○
9 ○	10 ○	11 ○	12 ○	13 ○	14 ○	15 ○
16 ○	17 ○	18 ○	19 ○	20 ○	21 ○	22 ○
23 ○	24 ○	25 ○	26 ○	27 ○	28 ○	29 ○
30 ○						

December 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP

DAILY HABIT 2 OF 3

Ask what happens the tenth time

Before you repeat a kindness, picture doing it ten more times.

Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

November 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
						1
2	3	4	5	6 ○	7 ○	8 ○
9 ○	10 ○	11 ○	12 ○	13 ○	14 ○	15 ○
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EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP

DAILY HABIT 3 OF 3

Check results once a month

On the first of the month, look back at one kindness you offered.

Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

November 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
						1
2	3	4	5	6 ○	7 ○	8 ○
9 ○	10 ○	11 ○	12 ○	13 ○	14 ○	15 ○
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December 2026

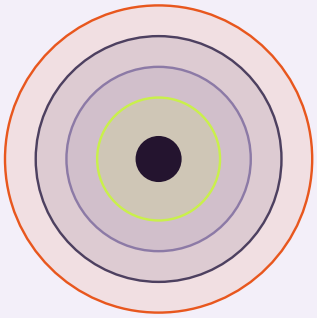
MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
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EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP



Keep the warmth, and let reason decide where it goes.

HOURLIFE NOTE AFTER GAD SAAD