

## September: National Suicide Prevention Awareness Month

The topic of suicide is taboo to some and is often stigmatized, resulting in people not talking about it. However, not talking about suicide isn't going to prevent it nor will it make suicide go away. Talking about suicide, talking about causes of suicide and talking about suicide prevention is how all of us can come together to raise awareness and combat suicide.



**Learn the  
Warning  
Signs.**

More than 41,000 people die by suicide each year and many more attempt suicide each year. Suicide affects everyone- all ages and backgrounds, all racial and ethnic groups, and in all parts of the county. However, suicide is not inevitable for anyone. By having a conversation, providing support and helping those who need it, together we can prevent suicide and save lives.

So how can we do this? Here is some helpful information:

### Know The Warning Signs

- Threats or comments about killing themselves, also known as suicidal ideation, can begin with seemingly harmless thoughts like "I wish I wasn't here" but can become more overt and dangerous
- Increased alcohol and drug use
- Aggressive behavior
- Social withdrawal from friends, family and the community
- Dramatic mood swings
- Talking, writing or thinking about death
- Impulsive or reckless behavior

### Is There Imminent Danger?

Any person exhibiting these behaviors should get care immediately:

- Putting their affairs in order and giving away their possessions
- Saying goodbye to friends and family
- Mood shifts from despair to calm

- Planning, possibly by looking around to buy, steal or borrow the tools they need to complete suicide, such as a firearm or prescription medication

### Risk Factors For Suicide

Research has found that about 90% of individuals who die by suicide experience mental illness. A number of other things may put a person at risk of suicide, including:

- A family history of suicide.
- Substance abuse. Drugs and alcohol can result in mental highs and lows that exacerbate suicidal thoughts.
- Intoxication. More than one in three people who die from suicide are found to be currently under the influence.
- Access to firearms.
- A serious or chronic medical illness.
- Gender. Although more women than men attempt suicide, men are four times more likely to die by suicide.
- A history of trauma or abuse.
- Prolonged stress.
- Isolation.
- Age. People under age 24 or above age 65 are at a higher risk for suicide.
- A recent tragedy or loss.
- Agitation and sleep deprivation.

## **Y-CARE: HOW YOU CAN HELP A SUICIDAL PERSON**

You are never alone. You are not responsible for anyone who chooses to take their own life. As friends, family and loved ones, all you can do is listen, support and assist the person in getting the help they need.

### **YOU -**

**CONNECT** the person to resources and to a supportive, trusted adult.

**ACCEPT** and listen to the person's feelings and take them seriously.

**RESPOND** if a person has a plan to attempt suicide and tell someone you trust.

**EMPOWER** the person to get help and to call The Trevor Lifeline (866-488-7386).

The effects of suicide are immeasurable and can often be long-term. Below is Jenna's Story on how suicide impacted her.

*It was shortly after 10am on a Thursday morning when I got the phone call that would forever change my life. I almost ignored the call, as I was at work and in the middle of something. However, I greeted my mom cheerfully. She moved out of state a few months before and we didn't talk as often as usual. I could have never imagined the three words she was about to say to me.*

*"Johnny killed himself."*

*Three words. Five syllables that took the breath out of my lungs. I don't remember exactly what happened in the next few hours, or days really. Whatever my reaction was - screaming, crying, probably both - it caused a couple of my coworkers to help me into a nearby meeting room. There was a blur of people coming in and out of the room to see if I was all right. I tried to be strong, but I could barely make complete sentences through the sobs.*

*A week later, I read a eulogy at Johnny's funeral. I remember trying to write out what I would say the day before. How do I put into words how amazing and wonderful my brother was? How do I help others understand that he was hurting, and after countless silent battles, he wasn't able to fight the war any longer? As I approached the podium in the funeral home, my eyes couldn't even take in the number of people who were crowded in the room, spilling out into the atrium. It's amazing how many people come out of the woodwork when tragedy strikes. Many of my brother's friends came, most in disbelief that he was gone. I had my own group of friends and coworkers, some that drove upwards of two hours one way, to show their support. Some of these friends were people I hadn't seen or even spoken to in years, but they came because they knew I was hurting.*

*Sometimes I think, had Johnny only expressed how much he was hurting, all of those people who were there that night could have wrapped them in their love and support and helped him through his struggle. I'll never know what could have or would have happened if the story changed. Exactly what was going on in his mind on that night that changed*

*our lives forever will always be a mystery. There are too many questions that will never be answered.*

*Johnny's death left a hole in my heart that will never heal. In the past five years, different parts of my life have attempted to fill that hole - I've gotten married to a wonderful man and we now have the most amazing daughter. However, the hole itself is still there - just like breaking a mirror and then gluing the pieces together, you'll always see the cracks.*

If you or someone you know has been impacted by suicide, there are resources available. Some online resources include:



- Suicide.org: <http://www.suicide.org/support-groups/minnesota-suicide-support-groups.html>
- Suicide Prevention Resources for Survivors of Suicide Loss: <http://www.sprc.org/sites/default/files/resource-program/Survivors.pdf>
- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention: <https://afsp.org/find-support/ive-lost-someone/find-a-support-group/>
- Benton, Sherburne, Stearns and Wright County's local crisis provider is the Four County Crisis Response Team: 320-253-5555 or 800-635-8008.
- TXT4LIFE (suicide prevention resource): text "LIFE" to 61222.
- If you are outside of the four county area, follow the link to find the local mental health crisis number for your county: <https://mn.gov/dhs/people-we-serve/adults/health-care/mental-health/resources/crisis-contacts.jsp>

Additional mental health resources can be found at: [www.mnmentalhealth.org](http://www.mnmentalhealth.org)

## References

National Alliance on Mental Illness. (2017). Suicide prevention awareness month. Retrieved from: <https://www.nami.org/suicideawarenessmonth>

Suicide Prevention Resource Center. (n.d.) Suicide is preventable. Retrieved from: [www.activeminds.org](http://www.activeminds.org)