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Preventing suicide at Lake Tahoe: The importance of listening during tough talks



When having a difficult, yet important conversation, it's key to remember that it is always the right time to listen.



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TAHOE-TRUCKEE, Calif. — We are constantly bombarded with the notion that, when we have an issue or concern, we need to address it with the people in our lives.

These opinions and pressures make it seem so easy to just ask someone something so difficult.

Have you ever asked someone “have you thought about suicide?” If you have, you know it’s not easy. The words are so simple, so what is it that makes the conversation so difficult?

Sometimes we fear that confronting a problem will make it worse, so we sit idly by and do nothing, hoping that shying away will cause the problem to disappear.

But in reality, how often does this happen?

If we ignore the problem, the problem doesn't go away; it is ignored and pushed aside, often causing the problem to worsen.

Imagine you feel the intense need to check in on someone's mental state and out of fear you don't ask those vital questions — how would it feel to know the simple questions you feared asking may have saved a life?

What happens when we finally have the courage to have a difficult conversation, or ask someone an incredibly personal and meaningful question?

Once we take this step it is imperative that we be patient and recognize that it is our role to intentionally listen to another's perspective.

One of the most important things in having such a meaningful conversation is to remember that it is always the right time to listen.

A conversation can't move forward to discussing options and solutions without allowing the speaker to truly feel heard and understood.

Don't try to problem-solve and jump right into a solution without truly listening and allowing the other person to feel completely heard.

How do I truly listen?

Acknowledge how difficult an individual's experience may have been, or how hard it seems for them to discuss.

Paraphrase what you are hearing.

Perception often turns into reality in life experiences. Don't tell the person they are wrong in how they feel.

Be honest. Tell the person this is a difficult and emotional conversation for you. Honesty builds trust and may help someone to open up further to you.

These conversations can be truly emotional and difficult to have. If you ever feel stuck and unsure of where to go next, you can always reach out to local resources for help.

If you would like to schedule a group training on the warning signs of suicide, please email me at smcclarie@ttusd.org.

Also, 1-800-273-TALK (8255) is available 24/7 and is the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

For other local resources, please visit: www.tahoelifeline.org.

Sarah McClarie is the facilitator for the Tahoe Truckee Youth Suicide Prevention Coalition. And , Outreach Facilitator for the Tahoe Truckee Suicide Prevention Task Force. Contact her at smcclarie@ttusd.org or by calling 530-582-2560.