

Preventing suicide at Lake Tahoe: Like physical health, mental health matters

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Special to the Bonanza



It is important to teach your children the importance of healthy emotions.
Courtesy Marzanna Syncerz-Fotolia |

MORE RESOURCES ON MENTAL HEALTH

Mental Health America:
<http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net>

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry: <http://www.aacap.org>

American Psychiatric Association:
<http://www.psych.org>

American Psychological Association:
<http://www.apa.org>

Center for Parents and Information Resources:
<http://www.parentcenterhub.org>

Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health: <http://www.ffcmh.org>

Kids Mental Health Information Portal:
<http://www.kidsmentalhealth.org>

WARNING SIGNS OF SUICIDE*

Talking about wanting to die

Looking for a way to kill oneself

Talking about feeling hopeless or having no purpose

Talking about feeling trapped or in unbearable pain

Talking about being a burden to others

Increasing the use of alcohol or drugs

Acting anxious, agitated or recklessly

Sleeping too little or too much

TAHOE-TRUCKEE, Calif. — As parents and caretakers, we are constantly looking after our children's physical health. Keeping a child healthy seems fairly simple: regular exercise, plenty of rest, visits to the doctor's office, and preparing balanced, nutritious meals.

But are we taking into consideration their mental health as well?

Like physical health, it is important that we pay attention to the basics of mental health in our children. We must give it thought, care and attention.

By doing so, we will promote our children's mental and emotional wellbeing, and can address potential mental health problems early, through intervention.

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By helping build a strong foundation of a positive self-esteem so that a child feels secure, can relate to others, and can grow.

There are many ways to achieve this, such as providing a child with a safe home, showing them love and respect, and providing them the opportunity to express emotions and feelings.

Having trusting relationships with adults and friends is also very important. Teach children the importance of healthy emotions and model your behaviors to match what you are expecting of them.

It is essential to keep in mind that there is a biological component to mental health. Even in a healthy, well-adjusted home, a child may experience mental health issues.

Acknowledging this may be frightening for parents but just like physical illness, treating mental health problems early may help prevent more serious illnesses from developing in the future.

Withdrawing or feeling isolated

Showing rage or talking about seeking revenge

Displaying extreme mood swings

*The more of these signs a person shows, the greater the risk. Warning signs are associated with suicide but may not be what causes a suicide.

WHAT TO DO

If someone you know exhibits warning signs of suicide:

Do not leave the person alone.

Remove any firearms, alcohol, drugs or sharp objects that could be used in a suicide attempt.

Call the U.S. National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 800-273-TALK (8255).

Take the person to an emergency room or seek help from a medical or mental health professional.

Consulting a professional is a safe first step. You know your child's emotional demeanor best, and when you see noticeable changes, alert your health care provider.

Some examples of behavior to look out for include:

- Social isolation
- Self destructiveness – self or with others
- Feelings of anxiety or constant worry
- Feelings of excessive anger
- Feelings of hopelessness
- Frequent nightmares
- Avoiding others and wanting to be alone
- Inability to concentrate or sit still
- Hurting other people or things
- Talking about suicide or death
- Major changes in sleeping or eating patterns
- Losing interest in previous activities
- Recklessness
- Sudden mood changes

By paying attention to mental health in our youth, we are teaching them that it matters. Mental health is just as important as physical health.

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

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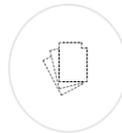


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