

Preventing suicide at Lake Tahoe: Mental illness is not a personal failure

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Special to the Sun



It's OK to be nervous and intimidated to have conversations about suicide. What really matters is that you have them, however, and that you support those who may be depressed.

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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

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.

TAHOE-TRUCKEE, Calif. — Why is it that over 60 percent of people with known mental health disorders never seek help from a professional?

Stigma, fear, neglect, and discrimination, are just some of the reasons those with known disorders do not seek care or treatment. Part of the problem, according to experts, is a lack of sympathy and knowledge about mental health ailments and struggles.

Another statistic claims that 25 percent of people with mental health issues find others to be compassionate towards them. This is a sad statistic, especially considering that approximately 25 percent of our population has experienced a form of mental illness.

Knowing that mental health disorders and mental illnesses are out of our control, what can we do to better address the issue and allow those struggling with these issues to feel comfortable reaching out for support?

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“Mental illness is not a personal failure. In fact, if there is failure, it is to be found in the way we have responded to people with mental and brain disorders.” Dr. Gro Harlem Brundtland, Director-General of the World Health Organization

We wouldn't criticize someone's control over their health when it comes to cancer, the flu, so why do we criticize and create such stigmas around mental illness?

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.

FREE COMMUNITY EVENT

May is Mental Health Month, and the Tahoe Truckee Youth Suicide Prevention Coalition will be hosting a free community event and movie screening on Sunday, May 3, at 5 p.m.

The event will be held at the Tahoe Art Haus and Cinema in Tahoe City, and will begin with a short survivor story, a brief discussion of the "Know the Signs" campaign, and end with a screening of "Silver Linings Playbook."

Parents and children are encouraged. There is no need to RSVP. For questions, contact Sarah McClarie at smcclarie@ttusd.org.

READ MORE: To adults, [childhood can seem like a carefree time, but youth still experience stress](#).

Experts have cited that part of the problem when it comes to criticizing someone's mental health is a lack of empathy and knowledge about the ailments.

Specifically when it comes to youth, we claim "it's just a phase" or "they'll grow out of it." The truth is mental health issues will not go away if they are ignored. They will become worse.

Mental health issues are real and can affect people at any age. Youth that do not receive treatment or support for mental illness can end up having problems in school, with friends, with addictions, and even with the law.

The earlier we are able to support someone in their mental wellness through treatment the easier it will be to break the cycle of stigma and fear around mental health.

When we talk about these issues with our youth we normalize them and make them feel safe in discussing these issues that are experienced by a quarter of our population.

READ MORE: Even with friends and family around, [someone experiencing emotional pain or suicidal thoughts](#) can feel isolated.

Recently, NAMI (the National Alliance on Mental Illness) released startling figures regarding mental illness and youth.

Did you know that only 50 percent of youth with mental illness will receive treatment? That youth age 14 and up are 50 percent more likely to drop out of school? And more startling, that 90 percent of youth that commit suicide have an underlying mental illness?

These statistics are frightening to read but more importantly they can serve to remind us how scary it is to let mental health disorders remain untreated.

Parents – talk to your kids. Intervening and letting them know you are there for support and are not afraid to hear their struggles can be the support needed to allow your child to receive medical help.

It's OK to be nervous and intimidated to have this conversation. What really matters is that you have it; that you talk to your kids and that you support them.

READ MORE: [Please visit suicideispreventable.org to learn more about the signs](#), find the words, and how to reach out.

Talking to your children about suicide will not put the idea in their head but will rather show them you are willing to go there with them and have that scary talk, that you are there to support them.

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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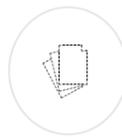


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 2



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 1