

# Preventing suicide at Lake Tahoe: Understanding emotional intelligence

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**Sarah McClaire**  
Special to the Sun



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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.

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

TAHOE-TRUCKEE, Calif. — Each day we become more aware of the importance of emotional intelligence, or social emotional learning, to our children, our educators, our parents and everyone.

It's not just important for better grades — it's needed to create better citizens, families and personal relationships.

Most people understand the critical nature of paying attention to the development of a whole child, and this includes character education.

Raising a self-aware child is critical; a self-aware child is a child who knows how to make responsible decisions and how to manage emotions, and he or she recognizes the opportunity to resolve conflict in a non-violent manner.

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This isn't just another thing on a parental to-do list, this is something that begins at home and is a constant practice. By creating a trustful and respectful environment, a child is surrounded by support; by modeling behavior that is emotionally intelligent, parents are able to take a step toward developing and nurturing an emotionally intelligent child.

Behavior at home is one of the first steps in nurturing an emotionally intelligent child.

Beyond the home, children are further taught emotional intelligence at school through character education programs such as Second Step.

In grades K-8 throughout the Tahoe Truckee Unified School District, Second Step is integrated throughout all activities.

Children are taught from a young age to respect others, vocalize frustrations, and consider alternative solutions to problems.

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

These lessons are taught not only in the classroom but also through interactions with hall monitors, recess duty teachers, and even bus drivers.

By constantly engaging our children, we are helping lay the foundation for them to become socially responsible and self-aware citizens.

It has been proven that emotionally intelligent individuals live a more fulfilling life, so it's critical that we provide our children now with the skills to recognize emotions in themselves and others and to feel comfortable in reaching out for support when needed.

By teaching children how to cope with the inevitable stressors of life, we are providing them the tools and skills to develop into responsible adults.

### **NURTURING AN EMOTIONALLY INTELLIGENT CHILD**

Here are some steps you can take at home to nurture an emotionally intelligent child, as well as some additional resources you can use to learn more about social and emotional learning:

**Be a Good Listener:** This is a core competency skill and one that so many of us lack. By modeling intentional listening and encouraging our children to do the same we are providing emotional support.

**Nurture your Child's Self Esteem:** Show your appreciation to your child. A child does better in school and in relationships when they experience a high sense of self-worth.

**Take Advantage of Support Services:** Encourage your child to reach out to trusted adults, such as the school counselor or teacher. Your child may not always want to come to you with an issue and encouraging these connections will allow your child to seek support in times of need.

**Model Behaviors:** It is important to always think of the impact of our actions on our children. By modeling the behavior we wish to see, we are encouraging our children to develop those behaviors as well. This is essential. For example, displaying empathy to our child's problems further encourages our children to do the same with their friends and with us.

By encouraging social and emotional learning we are teaching our youth that it is OK to express emotions and to reach out for support.

Through this encouragement we have the opportunity to close the gap in those situations where children feel there is no support, and instead we create a web of support whether it be through ourselves or other trusted individuals.

Supporting the emotional intelligence and growth of our children is a process and takes effort, but is well worth the results.

*Sarah McClarie is the facilitator for the Tahoe Truckee Youth Suicide Prevention Coalition. Contact her at [smcclarie@ttusd.org](mailto:smcclarie@ttusd.org) or by calling 530-582-2560.*

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 2



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 1