

Suicide prevention at Lake Tahoe: Life after an attempt is made

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Special to the Sun



Communication is of utmost importance in addressing the issue of trust between parent and child.

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For more information about how to support your child following an attempt, visit:

High Focus Centers:

<http://www.highfocuscenters.com> [↗](#), 1-800-877-FOCUS (3628)

Society for the Prevention of Teen Suicide:

<http://www.sptsusa.org> [↗](#), 732-410-7900

TAHOE-TRUCKEE, Calif. — The immediate crisis is over. Where do we go from here? When dealing with a suicide attempt, one of the largest challenges is aiding your child in figuring out how to get his or her life back.

From a parent's point of view, a lot of anxiety may occur knowing that your child is no longer receiving intensive mental health services.

You have a lot of questions on how to best handle things, how protective you need to be and if it is OK to leave your child alone ever. Following a suicide attempt or even an instance of self-harm, your trust in your child may be damaged.

Following advice from the Parent Awareness Series by the Society for the Prevention of Teen Suicides (sptsusa.org), here are some suggestions for the question of freedom following an attempt.

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COMMUNICATION IS KEY

Now your child is home, and you are trying to resume normal life, but also feel the need to protect. Many parents ask, "How much freedom should I give my child?"

What should and shouldn't we as parents allow them to do? Without the added concern of safety, these questions are challenging enough.

Communication is of utmost importance in addressing the issue of trust between parent and child following an attempt or an instance of self-harm.

Make it clear to your child that you expect open communication. Explain that the more information you have about how they are doing and what they are feeling, the more helpful you can be as a parent.

Consider establishing daily or weekly check-ins so you can layout boundaries and realistic expectations together.

Remember the importance of listening and not always talking, so you have a better understanding of what is happening in your child's life. If your child feels misunderstood, be open to their perceptions.

MONITORING SOCIAL MEDIA

Many parents feel the need to monitor cell phone and computer use of their child, especially following an attempt where trust is likely to be damaged.

Monitoring a child's interactions may be necessary to ensure they are making good choices. Many suicide attempts have been precipitated by negative interactions on Snapchat, Instagram or text messages, so knowing what your child is being exposed to may be necessary to help keep them safe.

Let your child know that you may look at their phone, and if they have a Facebook or Snapchat account, you require having access to them.

Yes, they can create another account and erase phone texts, but you are still sending a clear message of expectations that your child needs to hear.

Once your child is communicating with you more and getting healthier, your trust will build and the amount of supervision can decrease.

REINTEGRATE FRIENDSHIPS SLOWLY

Hanging out with friends is another area of your child's life that is important to consider. Friendships are vitally important to adolescent development, but when your child is struggling, conflict with peers is also a potential stress trigger.

The best advice is to reintegrate friendships slowly. Allow your child to have friends come over to your house. Be sure to check in after these interactions to get a sense of how it went.

Is your child feeling less stressed and supported or are they more stressed and tearful? These responses will be clues as to which friends are the healthiest for them to be around.

The best ways to interact with peers is usually in more structured situations like groups at school or church, clubs, activities or sports. They provide the opportunity for peer interaction but with adult supervision and an identified area of focus.

IDENTIFY PROBLEM PEERS

The more challenging question of course, is what about the peers who may have supported your child's unhealthy behaviors, like substance abuse or self-injury. How do you handle those relationships?

Hopefully, during the period of intensive treatment, the peers who were involved in your child's poor choices will have been identified, and a plan has been developed to address these relationships.

If that didn't happen, you would need to make your concerns about these friendships clear to your child, and keep your eyes open for behaviors that worry you.

Also, remember that changing a circle of friends won't happen overnight, and you need to be patient with the process.

CONTACT A COUNSELOR

Remember, what happened with your child and his or her attempt wasn't just an "attempt" – but rather a part of an ongoing mental health process that needs support and care.

You will continue to need to make decisions to support your child's welfare. If you feel at a loss or are struggling with these decisions, enroll the help of a professional.

Not only can a counselor be a sounding board for your thoughts, but they can suggest ways to communicate effectively with your child, and can assist you in making the best decisions.

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.

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