

Suicide: Not an untouchable subject

Ah yes, the dreaded "S word." Dare we say it? We might "catch" it; if we say it maybe we will make it happen; if I ignore it maybe I won't have to deal with it and I don't really want to deal with it. Yes it is easier to ignore the "S word" than to face it head on. The only problem is that if it is successful, it's too late. Reacting instead of being proactive is closing the barn door after the horse is already out.

Well, let's approach the subject anyway. Be prepared to turn away, it's not pretty.

Every year there are more than 33,000 suicides in the U.S. That's an average of 90 a day or a completed suicide on average every 16 minutes of every day of every week and month all year long. It is believed that there is a suicide attempt on average every minute of every day. That is over a half-million suicide attempts each year in America. Some estimates put the number above three-quarters of a million attempts. Thank God that 15 of 16 are not completed! Suicide is the fourth leading cause of death in the U.S. for adults between the ages of 18 and 65.

Per the CDC, Wyoming is back on top of the dubious list of suicides per capita at a rate of 22.6 suicides per 100,000 people (2006 data). The U.S. average is 11.2; Wyoming has double the number of suicides than the average state. We have never been lower than fifth on the list. What an honor...

I can recite statistics all day

Lance Neiberger

Perspective

long and will lose most readers, so let's cut to the bottom line; what is going on; what can we do? Suicide is preventable but we need to be willing to face it head-on. Running from it and treating it as an untouchable subject will do nothing to prevent suicides.

Research indicates that the best way to approach someone that may be suicidal is to talk with them directly about it. No, you are not going to plant the idea in someone's head if it wasn't there originally. Asking a person directly may give them the opportunity to discuss their problems and feelings. Often they see their problems as unsolvable; their problems may not seem that serious to you but they can be extremely serious to the suicidal person. Do not take them lightly, and don't dismiss them. At this time, they don't want to hear about your problems or situations, they need help and hope that there is a solution to their problems.

Mental health problems including depression are a big factor in suicides. Some of the other factors that can contribute to the risk of suicide are:

- Family history of suicide
- Abuse; mental and/or physical
- Previous suicide attempts (especially in young people)
- History of alcohol and

substance abuse

- Feelings of hopelessness
- Impulsive or aggressive tendencies
- Local epidemics of suicide
- Isolation — feeling of being cut off from other people
- Loss — relationship, social, work or financial
- Physical illness
- Unwillingness to seek help because of the stigma of suicide

Easy access to lethal means.

So what can we do? Each situation is different and needs individual attention. Generally the person may need outside help for their mental, physical or substance abuse disorders. Not everyone will react to a counselor or professional in the same way. If they don't feel comfortable talking with a certain professional, try another, and another until they make a connection that works for them.

Your support is imperative. They need a connectedness to their family, friends and community. They may need help in improving their skills at problem solving or conflict resolution and may need to find non-violent ways of handling disputes. They need to find a reason to live, not an excuse to end their pain and suffering. Young people may not be mature or experienced enough to work through the problems that they face for the first time.

Above all, don't ignore suicidal talk, thoughts or behavior. Seek help from the professionals in (and outside) our

community. Don't be judgmental, try to understand that the person's problems are serious and they need help to work through them. If there is imminent danger, call 911, the police are trained to help in these situations. For more help contact the National Suicide Help Line at 1-800-273-TALK (8255) or for questions on how to help, call the Jason's Foundation Community Assistance Resource Line at 1-888-881-2323.

September is Suicide Awareness Month. The Converse County Suicide Prevention Task Force will be holding a "We All Count Walk" today in Douglas from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. The walk begins in the Safeway parking lot and ends at Washington Park.

The Natrona County Suicide Prevention Task Force is holding their "Breaking the Silence" walk next Saturday, Sept. 18 starting at 4 p.m. The Casper walk begins and ends at the Crossroads Park shelter. You are welcome to walk to the soccer fields and back along the North Platte Parkway.

Both walks are intended to raise awareness to the problems of suicide in Wyoming and the U.S. These are not fundraisers but instead an opportunity to remember loved ones lost to suicide and to provide support to those who have lost someone to suicide. Everyone is welcome.

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