



CENTRE COUNTY PREVENTION COALITION
A SAMHSA Supported Drug-Free Community Coalition
Led By Centre County Drug and Alcohol



ARTICLE 19 – July 23, 2008 – Adolescent Depression/Suicide

Maryanne Neal is the co-chair of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention's "Out of the Darkness" Walk in Centre County from which monies raised benefit the local community's awareness efforts and fund suicide research. Ms. Neal lost her mother to suicide in 2004. This weekly column, published on Wednesdays, is a collaboration of Centre County *Communities That Care*® serving Bald Eagle, Bellefonte, Penns Valley, and Philipsburg-Osceola Area School Districts, and Care Partnership: Centre Region *Communities That Care*® serving the State College Area School District.

In nursing school, I had one of my first experiences with suicide. I met a young man in the pediatric intensive care unit who was the president of his senior class, captain of his basketball team and a straight A student. His attempted suicide failed and left him with irreparable damage to his face. It astonished me that a 17 year old who had everything going for him felt compelled to end his life. I now know that there is no "typical" suicide victim, that suicide is difficult to predict, and that suicide affects people of every socioeconomic status, race, and sex. According to the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (www.afsp.org), someone in the U.S. intentionally ends his or her life every 16 minutes. Suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death for college students and the 3rd leading cause of death for people aged 10-24. In 2006, there were 13 suicide deaths in Centre County. The youngest was 15 years old.

According to Dr. Amy Wenzel's research at The University of Pennsylvania, there are many myths about suicide, including:

Myth- People who talk about suicide don't attempt suicide.

Fact - *Many people who die by suicide have warned family and friends of their intentions.*

Myth- Asking a depressed person about suicide will push the person to attempt suicide.

Fact - *There's no evidence that talking about suicide increases a person's risk of attempting suicide.*

Myth- Once a person is intent on suicide, there's no way to stop the person.

Fact- *Suicidal crises are often short-lived and the person needs immediate help.*

Myth- Improvement following a suicidal crisis means the risk is over.

Fact- *Many suicides occur within days or weeks of improvement when the individual has the energy and motivation to follow through with his or her thoughts.*

Myth- Once a person attempts suicide, the pain and shame will keep the person from trying again.

Fact- *People who have made attempts in the past are at increased risk of attempting again.*

Myth- Sometimes a bad event can push a person to attempt suicide.

Fact- *Suicide results from a number of factors and not just a single event.*

Warning signs of depression and suicide risk that require mental health treatment include:

- An overwhelming sense of hopelessness
- Rage, anger, seeking revenge
- Reckless behavior
- Increased use of drugs and/or alcohol
- Withdrawal from friends and family
- Anxiety, agitation, inability to sleep or sleeping all the time
- Dramatic mood swings
- Loss of a sense of purpose in life

If you have a child, teenager or loved one experiencing these signs, get professional help. You can call the Suicide Prevention Hotline at 1-800-273-TALK or CAN HELP in Centre County at 1-800-643-5432. Both of these hotlines are available 24 hours per day, 7 days a week. It is important to recognize the symptoms and warning signs and get the help they need. You could save the life of someone you love.

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