



Know the facts: suicide can be prevented

September is National Suicide Prevention Awareness Month

By Melanie Dallas, LPC

Suicide has always been puzzling and tragic. Psychiatrists, psychologists and especially those who have lost a loved one to suicide often don't understand how an individual might perceive daily life to be so unbearable that he or she would choose death. And when suicide occurs, the tragedy is not only in the loss of a human life and the grief of those left behind, but also in the fact that in many cases suicide can be prevented.

While suicide among veterans has received much attention and resources – as it should – equally tragic are suicides among young people. In fact, suicide is the second leading cause of death for young people ages 10 to 24 in the U.S. Each day, an average of 12 young people complete suicide, while more than 1,000 attempt it.

Compounding the problem are many myths about suicide – myths that lead many to believe there is nothing they can do to prevent the suicide of a friend or family member. Two of the most common myths are that people contemplating suicide – especially young people – give no warning signs, and that talking to someone about suicide is more likely to make him or her do it.

But in fact four out of five teens who attempt suicide have given clear warning signs. One of the most important warning signs is talking about suicide. Equally important, if you hear someone talking about suicide, asking about it does not make him or her more likely to attempt it. Rather, asking about it can often be the first critical step in preventing it.

Highland Rivers Health is a recipient of a Garrett Lee Smith suicide prevention grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. The program – which was developed following the suicide of former Oregon Senator Gordon Smith's son Garrett in 2003 – allows Highland Rivers to provide enhanced suicide prevention services in the areas we serve. Those services include:

Early detection: Highland Rivers works with community partners to create a culture of support to prevent suicide attempts and completions in our communities through early detection and referral. We provide assessments to address risk factors and referrals to community support organizations.

Therapy: We have trained professionals who treat and minimize suicide risk factors. A licensed clinician and peer specialist are available to meet with individuals who report suicide risk factors and their family members. Staff have been trained to assess and manage suicidality and use interventions to increase reasons for living.

Support: We help loss survivors recover after the death or suicide attempt of a loved one through group therapy sessions and community support programs.

Education: Highland Rivers provides free trainings for community organizations, schools, colleges, healthcare providers and others so they can learn to detect suicide risk and intervene. A two-hour Question, Persuade, Refer (QPR) training can be scheduled at your location or you can attend other QPR trainings being offered in the area. This important and informative training can help you, coworkers, students or friends learn how to help someone who is thinking about suicide. And it's free.

If you are interested in scheduling a QPR training for your organization, school, workplace or community group, email us at ZeroSuicide@highlandrivers.org. If you or someone you know is thinking about suicide and would like to speak with a professional counselor, call us at (800) 729-5700 to learn how to enroll in services with our agency.

It is important to remember that suicide can almost always be prevented. By becoming aware of the risk factors and warning signs – and more important, learning how to intervene to help someone who may be thinking about suicide – we can work toward reducing the number of suicides in our communities to zero.