

News Column

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National Suicide Prevention & Awareness Month

According to the Kansas Suicidal Plan, the rate of suicide in Kansas has increased by 70% between 2000 and 2018. Read that again. It's upsetting, right?

September is National Suicide Prevention Awareness Month, set to engage health professionals and the general public in conversations about warning signs and prevention of suicide. This is a hard topic to address and many people avoid it for a variety of reasons, but by having open conversations about mental health and emotional struggles, we can help reduce the stigma surrounding suicide. This is ultimately what prevents most people from seeking the help they might desperately need.

Approaching someone who is struggling can be difficult, but saving a life is by far more important than some slight discomfort.

Simply start a conversation with the person and listen without judging to show empathy. This will help create a safe place for them to openly share their feelings. If you suspect someone is struggling, don't leave them alone. Make sure they are in a secure place with someone until further help can be given. Don't be afraid to ask if they have had suicidal thoughts - asking will not put the idea in their head, nor will it make them more likely to attempt suicide. Individuals either have these thoughts or they don't.

Although stress, depression, and emotional pain are not always as obvious as physical things like cuts and bruises, there are some warning signs that could help you identify if a person may be struggling.

You should reach out for professional help if you or someone you know is showing any of the following warning signs:

- Talking about feeling trapped or in unbearable pain
- Talking about being a burden to others
- Giving away prized possessions
- Increasing the use of alcohol or drugs
- Acting anxious or agitated
- Sleeping too little or too much
- Withdrawing or feeling isolated
- Displaying extreme mood swings
- Showing lack of interest in future plans

There are several ways to go about seeking help. Contact a professional such as a family doctor, hospital, or counseling service. The National Suicide Hotline can be reached anytime, day or night at 1-800-273-8255. If there is an immediate concern, dial 911 and get help straight away.

If you have lost a loved one to suicide, the impact can be extremely overwhelming. Know that you do not have to cope alone and seeking professional guidance or joining a support group can help you heal.

Together, we can all play a part in preventing one of the most rapidly increasing causes of death in our state. Although these conversations are very difficult to start, they can make the biggest difference to someone struggling with suicidal thoughts and feelings. You never know whose life you might be saving by being open and willing to talk.

For more information about Family and Community Wellness, 4-H Youth Development, or K-State Research and Extension, contact the office at 620-583-7455, email me at celutz@ksu.edu, or stop by the office. Visit the K-State Research and Extension - Greenwood County Facebook page and www.greenwood.k-state.edu for more up-to-date information on programming.