

Talking about suicide can be a preventative measure

By Alisa Merino

May is Mental Health Awareness Month and you may have heard the phrase “each mind matters.”

Why does each mind matter? Mental health is something we all have. Just as our bodies need attention, our minds also need nourishment and care. Suicide rates are increasing and there is a relationship between mental illness and suicide. According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), about 90 percent of people who die by suicide have experienced mental health issues.



Alisa Merino

At the Suicide Prevention Network, it is our goal to bring awareness to suicide. This includes recognizing signs and symptoms as well as reducing the stigma.

As community members, we all play a role in reducing the negative associations around suicide and mental illness. It is up to us to be advocates and caregivers who provide support and lifesaving resources for loved ones at risk.

Anyone can be at risk of suicide. Two big risk factors are having life stressors and lacking skills to cope with these stressors. Life stressors may include health, finances,

divorce, children, moving, family problems, employment, death of a loved one, or a loss of any kind. Some positive ways to cope with these stressors are exercise, deep breathing, healthy nutrition, appropriate sleep, listening to music, and talking to someone you trust.

Unfortunately, some may find that life stressors are too difficult or some choose negative ways to cope. Signs of suicide may include:

- Talking about death directly
- Giving away possessions
- Engaging in risky behavior (i.e. driving recklessly, coming to work intoxicated)
- Abusing or consuming excessive amounts of alcohol or drugs
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Eating too much or too little
- Making funeral arrangements
- Isolating from loved ones
- Engaging in self-harm (cutting or burning)
- Feeling hopeless.

If someone you know is displaying these signs or reaching out to you for help, it is important to have a conversation with that person. Here is one script the Suicide Prevention Network recommends to follow:

Step one: Ask. Ask the person directly if he or she is thinking about suicide. "I have noticed you have been acting different and I am really concerned. Are you thinking about suicide?"

Step two: Listen. Hear the person's story. Listen and offer support without judgment. "It sounds like you are going through a lot. I am so sorry. How can I support you?"

Step three: Connect. Connect the person to resources. "I want to make sure you stay safe; can we call someone so that we can keep you safe?"

Here are prevention and support hotlines that anyone can call for immediate suicide concerns:

- Suicide Prevention Lifeline
800.273.8255 or text "ANSWER" to 839863
- 24-hour Psychiatric Emergency Services (El Dorado County Mental Health)
Placerville: 530.622.3345
South Lake Tahoe: 530.544.2219
- Suicide Prevention Network
California or Nevada residents: 775.783.1510.

Other local mental health resources may be found **online**.

Suicide is everyone's business and there is support available. May we all be aware of our mental health and well-being so that we can help each other find hope and healing.

Alisa Merino is the program coordinator for the Suicide Prevention Network. The Suicide Prevention Network is a 501(c)3 and offers education, awareness, and supportive services to members of Douglas County and El Dorado County. Community members who have lost a loved one to suicide can attend a Survivor of Suicide Support Group monthly on the fourth Thursday at 6pm at Barton Public Relations office, 2092 Lake Tahoe Blvd., Suite 400 in South Lake Tahoe. The next meeting is May 25.