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Ask a Beaumont Doctor: Signs of Suicide, What You Can Do to Help

Dr. Barbara Herzog Belkin, Assistant Professor at Oakland University William Beaumont School of Medicine, answers questions about suicide.

Royal Oak City Commissioners want to break down the stigma attached to suicide and help prevent future deaths.

After two people committed suicide and a third person attempted suicide at Target Sports in the past five months, commissioners directed staff to work with community partners, such as Beaumont Hospital and Common Ground, to move forward with education and suicide prevention programs.

"I ask that we do something—that we act, but that we also talk," said Commissioner Peggy Goodwin, during the commission's meeting last week.

In the spirit of beginning a community dialogue, Patch asked Dr. Barbara Herzog Belkin, Assistant Professor at Oakland University William Beaumont School of Medicine, about suicide.

Patch: Can you share statistics? Is suicide on the rise in the U.S.? Is teen suicide on the rise?

Belkin: Suicide is the third leading causes of death in young people, accounting for 13 percent of all deaths among 10-24 year olds. Not only are suicide attempts up among teens but thoughts of suicide are also on the rise. Sadly, it is often not talked about.

Everybody experiences, at some point in their life, anxiety, sadness, and despair. They are normal reactions to loss, rejection, or disappointment. There are some people however, who experience much more extreme reactions that make them feel that all hope is gone and suicide is the only solution.

Many people, especially young people, have thoughts of suicide and these thoughts can lead to an actual attempt. Studies show that for every 25 attempts one is completed.

Patch: What are the warning signs to look for?

Belkin: Tragically, many warning signs of suicide go unrecognized.

Warning signs can include aggressive or disruptive behavior, substance abuse, and depression. Another important risk is access to firearms.

One way to help someone is to recognize suicidal behaviors such as expressing thoughts of death and a desire to leave this life. Also, changes in normal habits such as eating and sleeping patterns as well as spending time with friends.

Evidence of substance abuse is another warning sign, along with dramatic mood swings and lack of interest in schoolwork and extracurricular activities.

Patch: Are there risk factors? For example, if you had a relative that committed suicide, are you more at risk?

Belkin: Risk factors include:

Family history of suicide, mental disorders, and/or substance abuse

Also, substance abuse, physical/sexual abuse or violence

Mental emotional or physical disorders

They can be difficult to deal with and stressful which can trigger suicidal thoughts.

Patch: How can you help someone with suicidal thoughts?

Belkin: The most important aspect is suicide prevention is support, letting the other person know that they are loved and you are willing to help that person find hope again.

Communicate openly and freely. Make it clear that you care. Stress that you are willing to listen. If you find that your friend/loved one is contemplating suicide and the threat is immediate take them to seek professional help at once, the Emergency Center at Beaumont Hospital or call NAMI National Alliance for the Mentally Ill Help Line 1-800-950-NAMI (6264) who can help connect you with local resources.

Studies show that over half of suicide victims sought medical help within six months prior to their death. Take all threats seriously, you are not betraying someone's trust by trying to keep them alive.

Patch: How can you help yourself?

Belkin: Promise yourself not to do anything right now. Avoid alcohol and drugs. Make your home safe by removing things you could use to hurt yourself. Get rid of pills, razors, and firearms. Have hope-people do get through this. Don't keep suicidal feelings to yourself. Get help.