Mental Health: Suicide

Suicide is the 11th leading cause of death across all ages in the U.S. and the third leading cause of death in America’s youth today.

Suicide Facts
More than 34,000 people die from suicide each year, and another 832,500 attempt suicide every year. Mental disorders such as depression or a substance abuse disorder (usually in combination with a mental disorder) account for 90 percent of suicides. This is why it is crucial that those suffering from depression get immediate professional help. The National Institute of Mental Health has more information on depression at www.nimh.nih.gov/health.

Who is at Risk?
Suicide can affect anyone, but some groups are at higher risk than others. Men are four times more likely than women to die from suicide; however, three times more women report attempting suicide. Rates are high among adolescents and those over age 65. Several factors can also contribute to the risk of committing suicide, such as:

• Previous suicide attempt(s)
• History of depression, an eating disorder or other mental illness
• Alcohol/drug abuse
• Family history of suicide, violence or abuse
• Physical illness
• Feeling alone

Warning Signs
When a person is thinking about suicide, he/she will likely display indications, which may include:

• Threats, talk, or writing of suicide or hurting oneself
• Withdrawal from family and friends
• Sudden, excessive and/or uncontrolled rage
• Taking unnecessary risks or exhibiting self-destructive behavior
• Increased alcohol and/or drug use
• Hopelessness
• Dramatic mood swings

Not all suicides are planned; they may be impulsive after experiencing a traumatic event such as a breakup or unplanned pregnancy. However, in these cases, depression has usually been present all along.

Prevention
If someone you know is threatening suicide, it is important to start a conversation regarding his or her feelings. Most of the time, the person will talk willingly. Make sure to listen and express empathy. Do not leave him/her alone, and if he/she refuses professional help, see that a parent or trusted friend is informed.

Coping with Suicide
According to the American Institute of Suicidology, an estimated 4.6 million Americans have had loved ones commit suicide. The grief associated with this act can be complex. Not only is there sadness, but guilt may accompany it, if the person thinks it was possible to have prevented it. It is important to get help from a mental health professional or grief counselor, and some people find it helpful to join a support group or keep a journal.

For help and more information:
American Institute of Suicidology
www.suicidology.org
Jason Foundation
www.jasonfoundation.com

Did you know...?
About four out of five people with suicidal thoughts give some sign of their intentions. Those who talk about suicide, threaten to commit suicide or call suicide crisis centers are on average 30 times more likely to kill themselves. Learn to recognize the warning signs so you can get them the help they need.