

September is SUICIDE PREVENTION MONTH

Suicide! It is such a scary word, one that is often avoided or danced around. Maybe it is because we do not understand, we do not know what to do, it makes us uncomfortable, or we have been affected by a loss and have difficulties coping with our emotions. But for many Americans the thoughts of suicide are all too real. The World Health Organization estimates that approximately 1 million people die each year from suicide (www.helpguide.org). Suicide does not discriminate based on age, gender, or social status. This means that every person is at risk. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that the highest rate of suicide deaths among women is found between ages 45 and 64, while the highest rate for men occurs at ages 75+. Suicide is also the second leading cause of death for young people ages 15 to 34 (www.cdc.gov).

September is National Suicide Prevention Month. We need to take this opportunity to break the stigma associated with mental health issues like suicide and begin building a community where individuals are comfortable asking for help. Suicide can often be avoided if the person suffering has resources and supports available who know how to respond. So, what can you do to help raise awareness about suicide prevention for your friends, family members, colleagues and neighbors?

KNOW THE RISK FACTORS. Individuals are at higher risk for suicide if they experience depression or other mental health disorders, have a substance abuse problem, have chronic pain or other medical problems, have a history of family violence, recently experienced a traumatic life event, or have made a previous suicide attempt.

KNOW THE WARNING SIGNS. Many individuals will begin talking about being a “burden” to others, start feeling as if there are no solutions to their problems, withdrawing from friends or family, lose interest in activities that they once enjoyed, or even start talking about wanting to die or ways to die.

KNOW HOW TO RESPOND. First, do not leave the person alone if you are concerned about their risk for suicide. You must take all suicidal comments seriously. Remain calm and supportive and listen to what they have to say. Do not argue with them or attempt to tell them that their feelings or thoughts are “wrong.” Next, do not be afraid to ask them questions about their thoughts and feelings. The easiest way to find out if a person is considering suicide is to simply ask them directly: “Are you thinking about killing or harming yourself?” Although this question can be difficult to ask, it is the most effective and direct way to assess their risk for suicide. Do not allow yourself to believe that you will enhance a person’s risk of suicide if you talk to them about it. Quite the opposite is true - bringing up the topic and talking about it openly is one of the most helpful responses that you can have. If the person admits to suicidal thoughts or you still have concerns, then help them access resources as quickly as possible.

KNOW THE RESOURCES. If you feel that the person is in immediate danger then do not hesitate to call 911 or take the individual to a local Emergency Department. Emergency personnel are often trained to assist an individual with accessing a safe environment while getting help for emotional distress. If you do not feel that there is an immediate danger, then help the person get set up with counseling services. Counseling can assist them with managing emotions, finding solutions to problems, addressing mental health concerns, and working through the powerful feelings and thoughts that often lead to suicide. Encourage the individual to access suicide prevention hotlines. Save the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline’s number in your phone so it’s there when you need it: 1-800-8255 (TALK).

Together we can start the conversations that will assist with decreasing the stigma around suicide and begin to make Pike County a happier and healthier place to live. For more information regarding mental health, substance abuse, suicide prevention, or available resources please contact us at the Pike County Health Department at 573-324-2111.

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