



Marie Dudek Brown, a founding member of the Central Florida Chapter of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, left, listens to Central and Southern Florida Area American Foundation for Suicide Prevention Director Tara Sullivan on the signs of suicide. (Anthony Leone/Spectrum News)

Recognizing the Signs of Suicide, When to Seek Help

BY ANTHONY LEONE | ORANGE COUNTY

PUBLISHED 9:24 AM ET MAR. 20, 2019 | UPDATED 4:31 PM ET MAR. 25, 2019

ORLANDO, Fla. — It shocked many last week when a [17-year-old student took her life](#) at Lake Mary High School. What also surprised some was how she took her life. Psychologists say this information, although often morbid and disturbing, could become an important lesson for those who know someone who is suffering from depression.

- SEE BELOW: [Looking at the Numbers](#) ▼
- SEE BELOW: [Watching for the Signs](#) ▼
- SEE BELOW: [Preparing for the Worst](#) ▼
- SEE BELOW: [The Stigmas of Mental Health and How To Seek Help](#) ▼
- SEE BELOW: [It is OK to Ask for Help](#) ▼
- SEE BELOW: [WATCH: A Mother Shares Her Struggles After Losing Her Daughter](#) ▼

Looking at the Numbers

Florida's Suicide Facts

According to data collected by the CDC in 2016, suicide is the third leading cause of death in Florida for people between the ages of 15 and 24.

The junior used a gun when she killed herself in the auditorium at Lake Mary High School. The methodology of how she died is surprising. Statistically, women and girls are not likely to use a firearm to end their lives, [according to a 2018 CDC study](#).

Young women between 15 and 24 years old are 44 percent likely to use some form of suffocation to kill themselves, while 29 percent would use a gun.

However, [51 percent of young men](#) in that same age category will use a firearm.

"So we know that men are more likely to take their life by firearms," said [Central and Southern Florida Area of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention](#) Director Tara Sullivan.

Watching for the Signs

Sullivan and Marie Dudek Brown, a founding member of the Central Florida Chapter of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, both explained that the method of how someone ends his or her life is only one part of a larger issue, however.

The first part is to notice when something is very different with a loved one, such as changes in a person's mood or behavior, like expressing a sense of worthlessness or not doing activities that he or she used to enjoy doing.

How we Talk About Mental Health

"Our words do matter and how we use our words to describe mental health is important. We would never call somebody by a diagnosis, so if they had the diagnosis of cancer, we

"And one of the things that we always like people to know is you are most poised to recognize change in mood and behavior in the people that you're closest with because you have an intimate relationship and know them and know their daily activities and lives," Sullivan said.

What comes next might be difficult for some: Simply listen.

Sullivan described that just sitting down and asking questions like, "How are you doing?" might be easy, but the hard part is to listen.

"And you want to listen and you want to listen nonjudgmentally to what they have to say. It's not the time to give them advice or some kind of quick fix; what they need is to be heard. And listen to what they have to say," she advised.

Depression can present itself in many different forms and it is not always being quiet and withdrawn. Brown said anger can be a sign that something is wrong, with Sullivan saying that emotion can be a deep-seated underlying mental health condition.

Sullivan also warned that if someone who has been struggling with depression or anger suddenly appears happy or cheerful or start giving away cherished possessions, "it could mean that they have made a plan and that they have resolved to end their life."

Another common sign of depression is if the person starts or increases her or his use of alcohol or drugs.

"And if you feel that there is concern there and you really are thinking that 'I'm worried that they're going to end their life,' it's OK to ask that question directly. Don't beat around the bush; just ask, 'Are you thinking of suicide?' 'Are you contemplating suicide?' And you have to be ready to hear what the answer is," Brown said.

Brown said that by allowing that person the space to actually talk, he or she might confide in you — or if not you — that person might reach out to someone else because you addressed the topic and showed concern.

would never call them 'cancer.'"

"And culturally, we have used the language of a diagnosis with somebody with a mental health condition to describe that person. And we need to get away from that," said Central and Southern Florida Area of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention Director Tara Sullivan.

Preparing for the Worst

If a loved one or friend does decide to end things, he or she might decide to search online for different methods of suicide or even go out and buy a firearm, Sullivan said.

Earlier, she mentioned that men are more likely to use a gun, so she advises to hide a firearm if there is one in the household.

"Making sure that when somebody in your household is experiencing a mental-health crisis or unexplained change in mood, take the precautions to lock up firearms, keep them in a safe place, remove them from the home," Sullivan said, even suggesting having law enforcement hold onto firearms temporarily.

Overall, it is important to have a safe environment and that includes removing sharp objects, like knives, and medication, Sullivan added.

The Stigmas of Mental Health and How To Seek Help

One of the biggest problems Americans have is getting them to treat their mental health the exact same way that they would their physical health, Sullivan said.

Remembering Her Daughter

"One of the takeaways I guess would end up being that there was a point where I had to accept that the sense of what has happened, I can't change it.

"I don't think of my daughter in the terms of she died by suicide. Suicide does not define her," said Marie Dudek Brown about her 22-year-old daughter Natalie who took her life in 2003. "I can honor her memory by talking about her by even my tears."

"When somebody experiences a broken arm, there's no hesitation to go to the hospital and get their arms set in a cast," she said. "We're apprehensive of going and seeking help and what we really need to do is break down the stigma associated with reaching out for help."

In addition to seeking help from a medical professional, such as going to a family doctor as a first step or even seeing a licensed mental health counselor or a psychiatrist, many employers now have employee-assistance programs that offer free counseling sessions for those living in your home, recommended Sullivan.


It's OK to Ask for Help

For those suffering from depressions or with suicidal thoughts, one of the first important steps toward recovery is to simply ask for help.

"It's important to know that we can ask for help without feeling that we are weak or if someone else is going to judge us as being weak," Brown said.

"So to accept that this does happen to people and that it's okay to get the help that you need. It's actually the best thing to do for yourself. Because it's the only way that you're going to be able to improve and enjoy your life and thrive as opposed to just to survive. You want to enjoy life," Brown continued.

And Brown speaks from experience. She lost her daughter in 2003 when she took her life. Her story of recovery can be found in the embedded video.



Recognizing the Signs of Suicide, When to Seek Help

News 13

[Copy Link](#)

Marie Dudek Brown, of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, shares her story of loss when her 22-year-old daughter took her life.

The mother speaks about her struggles and how she created a new life.

YOU MAY ALSO BE INTERESTED IN



EMPLOYMENT

Central Florida Nonprofit Helping People with Disabilities Statewide Find Jobs

FLORIDA | 1 MONTH AGO



HUMAN INTEREST

Nonprofit for Overwhelmed Young Moms Dedicated to Slain Toddler

PINELLAS COUNTY | 2 MONTHS AGO



Life Coach on Destigmatizing Loneliness: "It's Part of the Human Experience"

FLORIDA | 5 MONTHS AGO



"The Silent Killer is Suicide": Law Enforcement Focuses on Suicide Among its Ranks

ORLANDO | 6 MONTHS AGO



Surge in Florida Health Workers Suspended for Student Loan Defaults

FLORIDA | 9 MONTHS AGO



St. Pete Urban Garden Hopes to Encourage Residents to Start Their Own

PINELLAS COUNTY | 11 MONTHS AGO