

Time to Speak Up: Recognizing the Warning Signs of Suicide and Promoting Emotional Wellness

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According to the National Institute of Mental Health, about 13 percent of Americans between 18 and 25 years old suffer from major depression. This common disorder can occur due to an underlying illness or situation — such as a family history of depression, abuse, or neglect — and without treatment can lead to a suicide attempt. Suicide is the third-leading cause of death among Americans between 15 and 24 years old, and more young adults think about or attempt suicide than adults aged 30 and older.

While it is normal for people of all ages to experience sadness from time to time, it's important to recognize when sadness crosses the line beyond normalcy and signifies an underlying trigger. Here are some of the signs of a worsening depressive state and tips on how to promote emotional wellness.

What Causes Depression?

Major Depressive Disorder is due to a combination of physiological and environmental factors. Fundamentally, depression can be caused by a hormonal imbalance of serotonin within the body, but it can also result from sickness and genetic makeup. External factors such as stress, loss, trauma, and even the time of year can also cause severe depression.

Seasonal Affective Disorder, or S.A.D., is a type of depression that occurs in seasonal patterns. Those who suffer from major depression may notice that the disorder escalates to levels beyond what is typical during the winter season. This is believed to be due to the lack of sunlight that occurs during the winter, which causes the body to produce less melatonin. The addition of this hormonal imbalance can push a person's depressive state beyond their control, resulting in suicidal thoughts.

When Is It Time to Seek Help?

Those who have experienced losing a loved one to suicide know the overwhelming emotions of guilt, anger, and sadness it can bring. Suicide often occurs unintentionally; it is the product of several internal and external factors coming together at the same time, leading a depressed individual to make an unchangeable decision.

Although there isn't always a single reason or indication that you or someone close to you might commit suicide, there are a few warning signs that can guide you to recognizing that something is wrong and needs to be addressed. Verbal cues can clue us into possible suicidal behavior, such as vocal expressions of feeling hopeless or trapped, or not having a will to live.

Certain behaviors can also be an indication, especially when the depressed individual begins to act erratically, shows signs of withdrawal, gives away personal items, or turns to drugs and alcohol. When you begin to notice a pattern of speech, behavior, and mood that suggest suicide, you need to address the patterns and seek help immediately, in order to prevent suicide from occurring.

How Do You Promote Wellness?

The best way to prevent suicide from happening is to recognize depression and take active steps to handle it in a healthy manner. Simply opening up to others can be effective in addressing depression. Finding a safe place to express yourself could alleviate symptoms of your depression. If you are affected by S.A.D., then you could help curb symptoms of your depression by adjusting the environment of your home. Adding more natural light, warmer colors, and more greenery in your home could bring your seasonal depression down to manageable levels.

It's also important to have a supportive team of experts who can help you achieve emotional wellness. You can ask a doctor, friend, or family member to recommend a

Certified Clinical Mental Health Counselor, who has earned a board certification to practice high standards of mental health counseling. Social workers are another great resource and are trained in diagnosing and treating issues related to psychosocial and mental health. These professionals typically receive their certification or license to work by completing a Master of Social Work program at a university.

Depression is a mental condition that shouldn't be minimized as simply feeling sad. Those who suffer from major depressive disorder know that depression isn't something that can be turned on and off like a switch. It's important to understand how depression works and how to communicate your feelings with others. If you are worried about managing your depression on your own, don't be afraid to seek out professional help, and always remember that there is someone out there who cares.

Guest author Melissa Howard of stopsuicide.info

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