

Helping Us Live Mentally Healthier Lives Since 1933

"The only people who really understand what it feels like to want to end their lives are those who have been there."

*Oprah Magazine,
January 2019*



Mental Health Matters: A Monthly Blog Post from the Director

September is Suicide Prevention Month: Let's Give This Issue the Attention It Needs Year-Round

It's hard to understand why someone would choose suicide if you've never felt suicidal. September is National Suicide Prevention Month and a good time to reflect on growing concerns around suicide—statistics, causes and, most importantly, how we can help save lives.

Suicide often stems from a deep feeling of hopelessness. According to *Psychology Today*, "The inability to see solutions to problems or to cope with challenging life circumstances may lead people to see taking their own lives as the only solution to what is really a temporary situation, and most survivors of suicide attempts go on to live full, rewarding lives."

Suicide rates are rising across the United States. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported that from 1999 to 2016, "suicide rates increased significantly in 44 states, with 25 states experiencing increases of more than 30 percent." In North Carolina, the rate of suicide increased 12.7 percent during the same period. A report in the *American Journal of Public Health* found that firearms were the most lethal method with a completion rate of 82.5 percent.

Nationally in 2016, there were nearly 45,000 suicides by Americans 10 years or older. Men accounted for three-quarters of all suicides, with the highest numbers among non-Hispanic white males between 45 and 65 years old. On average, North Carolina sees one suicide approximately every six hours. Mirroring national figures, the most common method was the use of firearms at 56 percent. This percentage is even higher among military veterans in North Carolina at 73 percent, and veterans have a suicide rate double that of non-veterans.

A look at youth suicide is also alarming. According to the website Youth.gov, suicide is the second leading cause of death among youth age 15-24. Approximately one out of every 15 high school students report attempting suicide each year. One out of every 53 high school students report having made a suicide attempt that was serious enough to be treated by a doctor or a nurse. For each suicide death among young people, there may be as many as 100 to 200 suicide attempts. For some groups of youth—including those who are involved in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems; lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender; American Indian/Alaska Native; and military service members—the incidence of suicidal behavior is even higher.

Knowledge Can Help Prevent Suicides

While the statistics relating to suicide are on the rise, suicide is preventable. Knowing the risk factors and recognizing warning signs can help prevent suicide. Mental Health America of Central Carolinas (MHA) is working in the community to increase the number of individuals, including our youth, who have the knowledge and skills needed to help prevent someone from taking their own life and getting the help needed.

Risk Factors, Warning Signs and Protective Factors (From *The American Psychiatric Association*)

Suicide is linked to mental disorders, particularly depression and alcohol use disorders, and the strongest risk factor for suicide is a previous suicide attempt. The Suicide Prevention Resource Center defines risk and protective factors and warning signs:

- Risk factors are characteristics that make it *more* likely that an individual will consider, attempt or die by suicide.
- Warning signs indicate an immediate risk of suicide.
- Protective factors are characteristics that make it *less* likely that individuals will consider, attempt or die by suicide.

Risk Factors for Suicide

Certain events and circumstances may increase risk:

- Previous suicide attempt(s)
- A history of suicide in the family
- Substance misuse
- Mood disorders (depression, bipolar disorder)
- Access to lethal means (e.g., keeping firearms in the home)
- Losses and other events (for example, the breakup of a relationship or a death, academic failures, legal difficulties, financial difficulties, bullying)
- History of trauma or abuse
- Chronic physical illness, including chronic pain
- Exposure to the suicidal behavior of others

Warning Signs of Suicide

- Often talking or writing about death, dying or suicide
- Making comments about being hopeless, helpless or worthless
- Expressions of having no reason for living; no sense of purpose in life; saying things like "It would be better if I wasn't here" or "I want out."
- Increased alcohol and/or drug misuse
- Withdrawal from friends, family and community
- Reckless behavior or more risky activities, seemingly without thinking
- Dramatic mood changes
- Talking about feeling trapped or being a burden to others

Protective Factors

- Contacts with providers (e.g., follow-up phone call from health care professional)
- Effective mental health care; easy access to a variety of clinical interventions
- Strong connections to individuals, family, community and social institutions
- Problem-solving and conflict resolution skills



Connection to Others Can Help

MHA feels strongly that sharing your story can be helpful to recovery. A recent article in Oprah Magazine (January 2019) titled "The Connection Cure: How talking about suicide can give people something to live for," asserts that people who are survivors can help others.

"To realize that somebody else has known that dark place is the only thing that made me feel less alone," says Devon Shearer, a former support group facilitator. This is the premise behind MHA's storyteller volunteers. Our storytellers, [like Missy Willis](#), help break the stigma that continues to exist around mental health and suicide, showing that it's okay to have tough conversations and that recovery is possible. Through regular Coffee & Conversations, MHA provides a space for individuals to come together to talk about mental health, learn about resources, and hear from others. [Click here to learn more.](#)

Connect with over 1,000 others locally to raise awareness and funds that allow the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) to invest in new research, create educational programs, advocate for public policy, and support survivors of suicide loss. [Join Team Mental Health America of Central Carolinas](#) at AFSP's Out of the Darkness Walk on Saturday, October 12 at Romare Bearden Park in Charlotte. Check-in/Registration Time: 12:00 pm/Program Begins: 2:00 pm/Walk 2:30-4:00 pm.

Actions You Can Take to Learn More

MHA regularly offers QPR (Question, Persuade, Refer) Suicide Prevention classes to help individuals gain the skills, knowledge and confidence to speak with someone who may be contemplating suicide. If someone indicates they are considering suicide, listen and take their concerns seriously. Don't be afraid to ask questions about their plans. Let them know you care, and they are not alone. Encourage them to seek help immediately from a knowledgeable professional. Don't leave them alone.

On September 17, community members will have two opportunities to make a positive impact with regards to suicide and mental health. On September 17, ***RU OK CLT*** at The Evening Muse will focus on suicide prevention with performers all having a connection to suicide. [Click here to learn more and purchase tickets](#) or for \$10 at the door.

In addition to The Evening Muse event, MHA will be hosting a free Question, Persuade & Refer (QPR) Suicide Prevention training at its office the same evening. [Click here to register for lifesaving QPR training from 6-8 p.m.](#) To learn more about the power of QPR training from some individuals who have benefited in our community, [check out this video.](#)

If you need help for yourself or someone else, contact the Suicide Prevention Lifeline call 1-800-273-8255 or chat online at www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org.

NATIONAL

SUICIDE PREVENTION LIFELINE

1-800-273-TALK (8255)

suicidepreventionlifeline.org

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Mental Health America of Central Carolinas promotes mental wellness through advocacy, prevention and education in Mecklenburg and Cabarrus Counties.



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