**Connected to Life, Connected to Hope**

People give many reasons for wanting to take their own lives. The bottom line, however, is that someone will commit suicide when they have lost all hope that things will get better—when they are convinced death is the best possible option and the only chance they have of relieving their pain. This is an incredibly lonely place to be. Supportive connections to other people—society as a whole, to groups, and to individuals—is a buffer that helps protect us from slipping into the ultimate hopelessness and loneliness that leads to suicide.

Consider the following:

- A 75 year Harvard study has demonstrated, "Good relationships keep us happier and healthier, period."
- Another study in San Mateo County, California began tracking those who attempted suicide. "People were disconnected from others were roughly three times more likely to die during the nine year study than people with strong social ties."
- Other research shows that there is a positive correlation between more time spent on social media and higher rates of unhelpfulness and loneliness. On the flip side, there is an indication that more time spent with others in person and greater happiness.

Although there may often be other interventions needed to help someone overcome hopelessness and to guard against suicide, being in healthy relationships with others is a key protective factor.

How does connection with others help?

- Close relationships with others help put problems into perspective. When we are connected to others, our problems are not as threatening, not as big, or at least shared with a burden.
- People who are contemplating ending their thoughts often will not reach out to others for support. Having close ties to others ensures a greater chance that others will be reached out to the person who is feeling suicidal. This can avoid friends and when professional intervention may be needed. Friends and family members who are actively involved in the lives of someone who is depressed is known as gatekeepers. They are often the first ones to become aware that an individual is at risk and they frequently have the first opportunity to get that help.
- Close, positive interactions with others can help to ward off feelings of loneliness. Close relationship with our families, especially when established early in life, can produce a greater sense of self-worth and self-efficacy.
- Strong involvement in our communities can bring with it a greater understanding of purpose and meaning in life. It can provide opportunities for meaningful achievement, in turn can gives us a healthy view of ourselves.
- Overall, socially connected people achieve greater fulfillment of basic human needs such as a sense of belonging, understanding of purpose, and the need for safety and security.

So, how can you be there to provide helpful social support to someone who is depressed or who may be suicidal?

- **Shore up.** Even if you feel your presence isn’t wanted, just being present with someone who is depressed sends a message, “You are worth it and you are important enough to me.”
- **Don’t try to cheer someone up when they are depressed.** This serves to reinforce the depressed individual’s idea that no one understands and further confirms them in feelings of loneliness. Instead, acknowledge how painful or overwhelming life is for them.
- **Be direct.** Although there may often be other interventions needed to help someone overcome hopelessness and to guard against suicide, being in healthy relationships with others is a key protective factor.
- **Practice self-care and set boundaries.** Offer to help them with tasks that seem overwhelming such as walking their dog or mowing the lawn. Many times the things you would do for someone who is grieving a death are the exact things one needs to do to overcome hopelessness and to guard against suicide, being in healthy relationships with others.
- **Other practical help when you can.** Offer to help them find resources. Offer to help them with tasks that seem overwhelming such as walking their dog or mowing the lawn. Many times the things you would do for someone who is grieving a death are the exact things one needs to do to overcome hopelessness and to guard against suicide, being in healthy relationships with others.
- **Offer helping hand when you can.** Offer to help them find resources. Offer to help them with tasks that seem overwhelming such as walking their dog or mowing the lawn.
- **Close relationship with our families, especially when established early in life, can produce a greater sense of belonging, a feeling of accomplishment, and the need for safety and security.

**Resources:**

- **A Suicide Prevention and Crisis Resource Guide for Connecting to Life, Connected to Hope**
- **The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:** 1-800-273-8255
- **To Write Love on Her Arms:** www.twloha.com
- **Suicide Prevention Resource Center:** www.sprc.org (Provides information on suicide prevention for people of all ages, including senior citizens.)
- **The National Alliance for the Mentally Ill:** www.nami.org
- **American Association of Suicidology:** www.aas.us
- **Mental Health America:** www.mhanational.org
- **American Foundation for Suicide Prevention:** www.afsp.org
- **Anxiety and Depression Association of America:** www.adaa.org

**Additional Resources:**

- **Cardinal Health:** www.cardinalhealth.com
- **Behavioral Health:** www.behavioralhealth.com
- **National Alliance on Mental Illness:** www.nami.org
- **National Institute of Mental Health:** www.nimh.nih.gov
- **National Institute on Drug Abuse:** www.nida.nih.gov