

Features

SUICIDE IS NOT PAINLESS

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Although a hushed subject of conversation at most dinner parties, suicide has become a major cause of death in America. Since the early part of the 1950's, suicide has become the third highest cause of death for persons between the ages of 15 and 24 - ninth leading cause of death overall. "In 1994, there were 23,730 victims of homicide in the US, while 32,410 people committed suicide", reported the National Institute of Mental Health.

When considering that suicide has become more prevalent than homicide, there seems to be a lack of education as well as discussion in the media as to this relatively newer trend-setting tragedy. Therefore, new and more current data is needed for educational use and social awareness of a sad, but real, problem.

The reasons have not changed much in the last few years, but the effects felt by family, friends, and community as a whole, have not been enough to prevent others to change their minds about taking their own lives, even when intervention is tried.

Many clinical psychologists agree that most people that have suicidal thoughts can be helped through their despair by first recognizing the problem and then through a combination of counseling, drug therapy, and a good support system. As stated in The Warning Signs of Suicide, "Suicide victims are not just trying to end their life, they are trying to end the pain and hopelessness" These feelings are real to the person and should not be treated lightly.

"College creates a new and sometimes scary environment..."

Scientific research has shown that almost all people who kill themselves have a diagnosable mental or substance abuse disorder; the majority have more than one disorder. Chemical studies have shown that a low level of serotonin, a neurotransmitter protein, in the brain can be a signal of a high risk of suicide. "More than 95% of the people who commit suicide show these changes in the brain (at autopsy)".

Many times suicide is looked at by teens and young adults as some sort of romanticized act. The person contemplating, or planning suicide,



self-achievement can also be confusing and slightly depressive. Again, relationships broken and affection not being returned are major causes of depression. Before these feelings arise, a good support system, or "safety net" is important to have.

As the first semester starts, students go through a ritual of finding someone to share themselves with. Although there is no anticipation for this ritual to ever change, it becomes a set-up for a big let-down. This is not to say that all relationships are doomed, but it can be very painful to be rejected for the ones who are, and death is sometimes seen as the only option to relieve the pain.

Why? Asked professionals and laypersons for years. The answer to this question is still very much a mystery. "Because it (suicide) is an irrational act, it is hard to explain rationally", states Dee Dasburg, Brevard College Counselor. Each suicide dwells in its own domain, and each may have its very own specific reason as to why, but the most common are feelings that are fed from a loss of control. "The road to self-destruction starts with depression and ends in the grave", says David Gelman in "The Mystery of Suicide." The fears and disillusionment's of our youth have become issues for all to consider. This means society, in terms of community awareness, has become paramount to the needs of the youth of today. Instead of looking upon suicide as a moral issue, consider the loss.

actually sees him/herself pain free, at the funeral with family and friends mourning his/her demise. In this respect, one thinks of death as an extenuation of life. Some examples of the life extenuation theory are the mass suicides in Guyana and California.

In 1996, a survey conducted in North Carolina found that one out of five high school students said they had thought about committing suicide. This can be linked to such things as a broken relationship, especially if it included first time sexual intercourse, physical abuse in the home, loss of a family member in the home, whether by death or separation of some kind, or the cruel, and sometimes devastating treatment from peers.

College creates a new, and sometimes very scary, environment for newly graduated high school students. Thrust into the fast paced, highly stressful world of higher learning can be extremely hard to cope with at times. Passing from a world of being told what to do, to one that insists on



Karl Slaikew, in Crisis Intervention, reminds us that "Suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem". One suicide generally affects at least 5 persons. Multiply that by the number of suicides, and the numbers become very depressive. There is a crisis in America, and solutions need to be sought. "...suicide is a dreary and dismal wintry storm within the mind, where staying afloat or going under is the vital decision being debated," says Edwin Shneidman in Greeks Assisting Greeks. Our youth are a most important asset in the quest for a better tomorrow.

As a question for thought: Would the cumulative acts of self-destructive abuse, such as an unintentional overdose of drugs, or toxic alcohol poisoning, be considered a suicide, even though the person knew the risks? Keep in mind the irrational behavior, as well as thoughts mandated by the person's addiction.

On the campus of Brevard College, counseling is available through Dee Dasburg. She can be a great source of help and support for those students in need. Her office can be the first step toward recovery and spiritual health.

These seem to be the most accepted warning signs of suicide, but it is important to note that depression seems to be the common element in most attempts at suicide.

Some of the most common warning signs associated with thoughts of suicide are:

- * "Abrupt changes in personality
- * Giving away possessions
- * Previous suicide attempt
- * Inability to tolerate frustration
- * Use of drugs and/or alcohol
- * Eating disturbances, significant weight loss
- * Sleeping disturbances
- * Withdrawal
- * Unwillingness or inability to communicate
- * Sexual promiscuity
- * Depression
- * Extreme or extended boredom
- * Inability to concentrate
- * Accident prone
- * Unusually long grief reaction
- * Hostial behavior
- * Neglect of academic work
- * Neglect of personal appearance
- * Family disruptions
- * Running away from home for truancy from school
- * Rebelliousness-reckless behavior
- * Withdrawal from activities they love."