

Hope in Dark Times: Suicide Awareness and Intervention By Christine Jackiw

In grade 10 my best friend's dad died by suicide. Thirty-some years later, the events of that day stand as clear in my mind as if it were yesterday. These things stay with you. I'm sure many of you have also been impacted by suicide, some in more intimate immediate ways. When someone dies by suicide, a ripple effect is created; the number of people changed by the loss cannot be estimated. In 2001, 3692 people died by suicide in Canada. Globally, approximately one million people die annually by suicide, more people than those who die by all natural disasters and wars combined. I wish I could guarantee that our community would be exempt from such losses, but unfortunately, suicide doesn't discriminate. It affects all education levels, cultures, economic classes, genders and ages. It happens to good people, good families, and good communities.

Hope

Here is the good news: we possess an endless renewable supply of the best protection available to keep ourselves and those we care about safe from suicide. *Hope*. We can find it in the person at the desk next to us, in an instructor, in the person we encounter daily in the cafeteria or the library, in me and in you. We are one another's hope. With the simplest of gestures, a caring, informed person can offer someone in the grips of suicidal thinking a way out of the darkness.

How?

Anxiety surrounding the issue of suicide can sometimes force people into silence. Those contemplating suicide may hesitate to speak openly of their feelings for fear of being stigmatized. Despite this fear, the majority of people who complete suicide communicate their intent either directly or indirectly prior to taking action. Often, these first gestures for help are directed to lay people rather than trained professionals. Lay people wondering if someone else is at risk may feel ill equipped to approach the subject. Many feel they are not 'qualified' to help or people may simply be uneasy about what to say or what to do. A few basic practical skills can be all that is needed to effectively intervene and assist a person at risk to access appropriate professional care.

Only two things are required:

- Learning the facts about suicide
- Developing some simple, practical strategies to speak openly about suicide with someone who may be at risk

Building our confidence and competence in these two areas helps strengthen and protect us as a community.

QPR

The **Q**uestion, **P**ersuade, **R**efer program teaches simple techniques that can help people feel more confident in their own abilities to be helpful to someone in crisis. In a 1.5 hour session, participants can learn to:

- recognize suicide warning signs
- ask the 'right' questions
- create a 'safety net' of helping professionals for a person in need.

Funded by Student Services, QPR suicide awareness and intervention training sessions are open to anyone within the McMaster community free of charge.

These sessions are held monthly:

To register online visit <http://csd.mcmaster.ca/events/register/>

Come. Bring a friend. There can never be too much hope.

For more information, contact Christine Jackiw Jackiw@mcmaster.ca or Nathan Cooper coopern@mcmaster.ca.

Some Suicide Warning Signs

- Indirect or direct verbal indications of suicide
- Changes in mood or behaviour
- Withdrawing from others
- Untreated depression
- Acquiring means of self harm
- Experiencing a significant loss (e.g. financial, professional, relationship, health)
- Changes in eating or sleeping patterns
- Increased use of alcohol or drugs
- Loss of a friend or loved one, particularly if by suicide
- Giving away possessions
- Getting affairs in order

CRISIS RESOURCES

ON CAMPUS:

Centre for Student Development MUSC B107 905 525-9140 ext.24711

Campus Security/EFRT Dial'88'

OFF CAMPUS

COAST Crisis Line - Crisis Outreach and Support Team 905 972-8338

Suicide Crisis Line, Education and Resource Centre:

Crisis Line 905 522-1477

Business Line 905 521-1660