

Suicide Prevention Resources are Available

By Bob Swanson, retired president of Swanson & Youngdale, Inc.

Knowing more about mental illness can help you, your loved ones, and co-workers.

As a member of the construction industry and a father who lost a son to suicide, I appreciate this opportunity to share information with members of the IUPAT.

A little background about my journey with this topic: Our oldest son, Michael, lived with a brain disease by the name of bipolar disorder. This disease led to his death by suicide at the age of 33 on March 13, 2009. By all physical appearances, the mental anguish that he experienced was usually not visible. As part of my healing process and in honor of my oldest son, I chose to retire in August of 2015 so that I could devote more time and energy to reducing the shame of mental illness and, through educating others, reducing the incidence of suicide. In that regard, I have been a speaker and instructor at various venues for NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) Minnesota.

Most of all, I want people to know that there is help available, particularly since one in four adults will experience a mental illness each year and the most common mental illnesses are depression and anxiety disorder. I hope the following information aids in understanding how common mental health issues are and ways to help yourself, loved ones and co-workers.

A few facts regarding suicide in the United States:

- In 2014, 42,773 Americans died by suicide. This is an increase of 24 percent since 1999.
- Suicide is the 10th leading cause of death. It exceeds deaths by traffic accidents or homicides.
- *Suicide is the second leading cause of death among persons 15 to 24.*
- 50% of all suicides are associated with alcohol and drugs.
- The main risk factors of suicide are depression and substance abuse.
- It is estimated that there are up to 25 suicide attempts for each suicide death. Many attempted suicides are unreported.
- 20% who die by suicide made a previous attempt.
- 75% who die by suicide are male.

Misconceptions regarding suicide:

- If they are asked, "Are you thinking about suicide?" it will put the idea in their head. *They are already having suicidal thoughts without you asking.*

- If they talk about suicide, they are just trying to get attention. *This is actually a cry for help.*
- People who attempt suicide want to die and there is nothing that can be done. *The person wants to end their pain, and suicide appears to them to be the remedy.*

Warning signs of suicide:

- A sudden change in mood or behavior.
- Lack of concentration.
- Talking or writing about death, including statements like, "Everyone would be better off if I were dead."
- Giving away treasured possessions, and perhaps saying, "I won't need these anymore."

If you are concerned that someone is contemplating suicide, take the following steps:

- Ask them about their thoughts; listen and show genuine concern about what they are saying. Do not demean their thoughts by saying something such as, "You're not thinking of doing something stupid like killing yourself."
- Get their agreement to get help.
- Arrange for them to get help. Stay with them and remove any means that could be used for a suicide attempt.
- If necessary, call 911 and request someone certified in crisis intervention.

There are many resources available, including the following:

- TEAM (team@team-mn.org) - The employee assistance program's 24-hour crisis line is 651-642-0182.
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - The 24-hour crisis line is 1-800-273-8255.
- Hennepin County 24-hour crisis line is 612-642-0182.
- Ramsey County 24-hour crisis line is 651-266-7900.
- NAMI Minnesota (National Alliance on Mental Illness), www.namihelps.org or 651-645-2948.
- SAVE (Suicide Awareness Voices of Education), www.save.org or 952-946-7998.