

# HEALTH LIVING

## Stigma is a major barrier for suicide prevention

Suicide is one of the leading causes of death in the world, especially among young people. Nearly one million people worldwide die by suicide each year. This corresponds to one death by suicide every 40 seconds.

While suicide rates have been lower in Halton Region than across Canada, Halton residents do attempt suicide and take their own lives. An average of 30 suicide deaths occur each year and over 420 hospitalizations from attempted suicides.

Keep in mind that a large proportion of people who die by suicide suffer from mental illness. Recent estimates suggest that the disease burden caused by mental illnesses will account for 25% of the total disease burden in the world in the next two decades, making it the most important category of ill-health.

A significant number of those with mental illnesses who die by suicide do not contact health or social services near the time of their death. In many instances there are insufficient services available to assist those in need at

times of crisis.

The stigma that exists around mental illness can prevent or discourage people with suicidal ideation or behaviour from seeking professional help or from returning to their normal social roles after receiving treatment for an episode of illness or crisis.

Most people have suicidal thoughts or feelings at some point in their lives; yet less than 2% of all deaths are suicides. Nearly all suicidal people suffer from conditions that will pass with time or with the assistance of a recovery program. There are hundreds of modest steps we can take to improve our response to a person with suicidal thoughts and to make it easier for them to seek help.

Distress Centre North Halton is a non-profit organization that offers suicide prevention as one of their services. The following are some suicide prevention tips they recommend:

### 1. Take talk about suicide seriously



Suicidal people are ambivalent; they just want the pain to stop! Nobody can assume that because you can cope with a situation or feeling, that the person next to you is feeling the same way. It is not how bad the problem is, but how badly the person is hurting.

### 2. Listen

Give the person an opportunity to express their thoughts and feelings. You don't need to say much, there are no magic words. If you are concerned, your voice and manner will show it. When a person has a chance to vent their feelings, there is relief from being alone with their pain. Let the person know that you are glad they turned to you. Remain calm, patient and empathize. Avoid arguments and advice giving.

### 3. Explore for thoughts of suicide

The stigma around mental illness and suicidal ideation can make asking for help very difficult. Show the per-

son you really care and that they are important to you. Take the opportunity to demonstrate that you are taking their suicidal feelings seriously and you are there to help in any way. If the person is having thoughts of suicide, find out how far along their ideation has progressed.

### 4. Connect with professional help

Encourage and help the person to connect with someone who can help them stay safe. There are many organizations in Halton that provide help to people suffering from mental illness and suicidal ideation. Let the person know that you care and want to maintain contact.

*Distress Centre North Halton is a community-based, non-profit, charitable organization. Its services are free and confidential. For 40 years, our Distress Centres have provided emotional support, crisis prevention and intervention with an emphasis on listening and befriending. Info: [www.distresscentrenorthhalton.ca](http://www.distresscentrenorthhalton.ca).*

**The Help Line is 905-877-1211.**

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**Q:** I have problems sleeping. I don't want to take sleeping medication, what are my options?

**A:** Naturopathic treatments for sleep are most successful when implemented before a person starts using prescription sleep medication routinely. Consider naturopathic sleep therapies as your first option, not a last resort. Re-establishing a healthy sleep/wake cycle has 3 components that work together. The first component is establishing a consistent evening and daily routine that promotes sleep. The second component involves a customized eating plan that balances blood sugar and avoids the top 5 dietary sleep disruptors within 10 hours of lights-out. Individual food intolerances are also tested. The third component is a targeted vitamin program that helps to calm the mind and cue the brain into a new sleep/wake cycle. Additional herbal support is added for women who are affected by menopausal night sweats, and amino acid therapies are incorporated when high grade stress or depression is involved. Now if we could only do something about the snoring spouse...

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