

# SUICIDE ALERT WORKSHOP COMING TO GEORGETOWN

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Georgetown resident Cindy Wood is hosting a safeTALK workshop on Feb. 27.

Georgetown resident Cindy Wood thinks back to that day she sat with her friend in the backyard chatting.

She wonders if her friend would still be alive if she knew back then what she knows today about suicide.

The two had similar conversations many times prior to that day, speaking about her friend's state of crisis and previous attempts at ending her life, with Wood carefully choosing her words each time, saying what she thought would put her friend most at ease in the moment.

"You think you say all the right things, like 'Oh, my god, I love you, what would we do without you,'" she said. "It breaks my heart to think maybe there was something I could have said or done to change the course."

After losing her friend two years ago, Wood began to do her research, desperate to find any information online that would help her gain the tools to be able to effectively speak to others about suicide.

That's when she discovered LivingWorks, a suicide intervention training company. There, Woods participated in a two-day course called ASIST (Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training), which changed her way of thinking completely.

"People who, from what I understand, think about suicide, they usually have a

plan and if you can talk to them about their plan, and basically just come out and ask them, they may appreciate that," she added.

According to the Halton Suicide Prevention Coalition, 4,000 people in Canada die by suicide each year. Halton Regional Police receive one call per day, on average, related to suicide.

Data from the World Health Organization also reveal that prior to every suicide there are up to 20 attempts.

Wood's training provided her with the necessary information to be able to effectively speak and listen to people with thoughts of suicide, then connect them to the right form of help if needed.

"I've lost a few friends and loved ones and I don't want to be in that situation again where someone is so hopeless and you just don't know what to say to them," Wood said. "I think we need to talk about it more."

Next month, Wood plans to put her thoughts into action by hosting a safeTALK

## SUICIDE STATISTICS HALTON

**4000**

Approximately 4,000 people die by suicide in Canada each year

**1** On average, Halton Regional Police receives one call each day related to suicide



**4X**

Women attempt suicide at a rate 4x higher than men, while men die by suicide at a rate 4x higher than women

**4X**

**AGES 10 TO 24**

Suicide is the second leading cause of death for individuals ages 10 to 24

**20 ATTEMPTS / 1 SUICIDE**

According to a World Health Organization estimate, there are up to 20 attempts for every suicide

Source: Halton Suicide Prevention Coalition

training session in Georgetown on Feb. 27.

SafeTALK is a half-day workshop that prepares those 15 years of age and older to become suicide-alert helpers.

The session, which will be run by suicide interventionist and president of Life Voice Shawna Percy, teaches participants step-by-step tips, which each coincide with a letter in the acronym TALK.

The meaning of the "T" is twofold, Percy says.

On the one hand, it is important to be able to try to tell someone as clearly and directly as possible if you are having thoughts of suicide.

However, she adds, this is often a lot to ask of a per-

son in distress, so it is also important for those who notice someone who may be having thoughts of suicide to encourage that person to talk openly about it.

The "A" stands for ask, which refers to directly asking the person in need about suicide.

"We really just need to put it on the table and ask them, 'Are you thinking about ending your life?' Or 'Are you thinking about suicide?' And when we are asking a clear and direct question like that we are communicating that we are people who are willing to have that conversation and that alone can create some relief for people from the pain they are in," Percy said.

The next step, and quite

possibly the most important, Percy says, is to listen.

"Most people are not looking to be fixed - they are looking to be seen and heard," Percy said, adding that it often goes a long way to sit with the person and hear about what they are feeling, rather than to try to find a solution or something optimistic to say in re-

### SHAWNA PERCY'S TIPS:

- There are certain phrases that should be considered when broaching the subject of suicide.
- Don't say somebody "committed suicide." Rather, say somebody suicided, somebody took their life or somebody died by suicide.
- Don't say somebody had a "successful suicide attempt" or a "failed suicide attempt." Rather, simply call it a suicide attempt.
- When asking someone about thoughts of suicide, don't say "You're not thinking of suicide, are you?" or "Are you thinking of harming yourself?" Rather, use a direct and unbiased approach by asking them, "Are you thinking about suicide?"

sponse.

"For someone who's feeling really bad, they may just need a person to come along and sit in the muck with them and that's part of what will help free them from being in the muck," she added.

The final step, or "K" of the acronym, is to keep the person safe for the time being.

In this step, people are encouraged to make a connection between the person in need and someone who is able to perform a full intervention piece.

Often, Percy says, it may be helpful to give the person in distress some options as to who they would prefer to speak to, prior to making that connection.

"Having thoughts of suicide is part of the human experience for many people," Percy said. "Really what it comes down to is someone is facing some kind of obstacle in their life and what they are struggling with is how to get on the other side of that."

The safeTALK training session will be held at St. Andrew's United Church (89 Mountainview Rd. S, Georgetown) on Feb. 27 from 6 to 9:30 p.m.

To access resources for crisis support, visit <https://www.lifevoice.ca/crisis-supports>.



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