

PROVIDING SUPPORT TO PREVENT SUICIDE

KNOW THE SIGNS AND DON'T STAY SILENT, WRITES MCGREGOR



MELANIE MCGREGOR
Column

Robin Williams, Anthony Bourdain, Kate Spade ... well-known people who recently took their own lives. Following tragic losses such as these, people may be more aware and talk openly about suicide, but these conversations tend to fall to the side as time goes on.

Many of us shy away from talking about suicide because we don't know what to say or do if we are concerned about someone in our lives or we don't know how to recognize if someone may be at risk. Common signs that someone may be having thoughts of suicide include the following:

- Withdrawal from people and activities he/she usually enjoys
- Changes in mood or behaviour, such as seem-

ing more down or angry

- Risky or reckless behaviour, including increased substance use
- Hopelessness or helplessness, such as saying "Things will never change" or "Nothing will ever get better"

- Talking about suicide or death directly or indirectly, such as saying "I don't want to be here anymore" or "I don't think I can go on"

It can be uncomfortable and frightening to see someone struggling and not know how to help. If you're concerned, consider these actions:

- Remember that suicide is about ending pain, not about dying. It's more about "I don't want to live like this" than it is about "I don't want to live" and people may want to find another way to cope with what they are struggling with.

- Don't be afraid to ask about suicide directly. Asking "Are you thinking about suicide?" will not give someone the idea - it will give them permission to open up about what they are feeling.

- Take any talk of suicide seriously. Don't dismiss it as attention-seek-

ing or exaggeration.

- Know supports to suggest. Offer to call the 24/7 COAST Crisis Line with the person or sit with them while they make that call to talk to a professional. Support is also available at local hospitals - could you go there with them, or is there someone else they would like to call to be with them?

- Don't promise to keep thoughts of suicide a secret. You can't be the only helper - more support is needed to help keep the person safe.

- If you are concerned about someone's immediate safety, call 911 to get help.

Keep the COAST number handy - 1-877-825-9011 - and think about taking an Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST) course with us at CMHA. Get more details on our website at www.halton.cmha.ca.

Talking about suicide and supports can save lives. Keep the conversation going.

Melanie McGregor is the communications and advancement specialist at the Canadian Mental Health Association Halton Region Branch, which provides mental health/addiction community support and education. Visit www.halton.cmha.ca for more information and follow @cmhahalton on Twitter.

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