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Health

Watch for teen suicide warning signs

Suicide is the eighth leading cause of death in North America and the second leading cause of death among young people, ages 15 to 19 (after traffic accidents).

For every teenage suicide, there are more than 100 unsuccessful attempts, and "copycat" suicides extend the tragedy even further.

There are behavioral patterns that are found in the backgrounds of most suicide victims - stress, confusion, pressure to succeed, self-doubt, and financial uncertainty.

These patterns often surface dur-

ing adolescence.

Suicide is frequently a "solution" for teens who face a divorce in the family, moving to a new community, death of a close friend, enduring emotional, physical or sexual abuse, or experiencing even a broken romance.

Most teen suicides, in spite of what people may think, are preventable and there are a number of warning signs that can alert parents to seek professional help. They are:

- Withdrawing from friends and family and regular activities;
- Drug and alcohol use.
- Changes in eating and sleeping habits.
- Violent actions, rebellious behavior or running away.
- Marked personality change.

- Persistent boredom, difficulty concentrating or decline in the quality of school work.

- Unusual neglect of personal appearance.

- Loss of interest in normal and pleasurable activities.

- Frequent complaints about physical symptoms, such as, headaches, backaches, stomachaches, and fatigue, etc.

- Not tolerating praise or rewards.
- Complaining of being rotten inside.

- Expressing suicidal thoughts, even jokingly and when angry.

- Giving verbal hints, such as, "I will not be a problem for you any longer", "nothing matters", "I will not see you again", "It is no use".

- Putting their affairs in order, for example, giving away favorite possessions, cleaning their room when they don't normally do so, throwing away important belongings, etc.

- Suddenly becoming cheerful and happy after a period of depression.

If an adolescent says, "I want to kill myself" or "I am going to commit suicide", take the statement seriously and immediately seek medical help. Experts feel that it is okay to ask a depressed adolescent whether they are thinking about suicide. Rather than putting thoughts in their heads, the question will provide assurance that somebody cares. The death of a young person is always a tragedy. It is even a greater tragedy when a child takes his or her own life.

This article was written by Hayward S. Hann, a volunteer grief facilitator with Lift and Hospice Markham Stouffville. He is active in support groups and with families dealing with suicide.

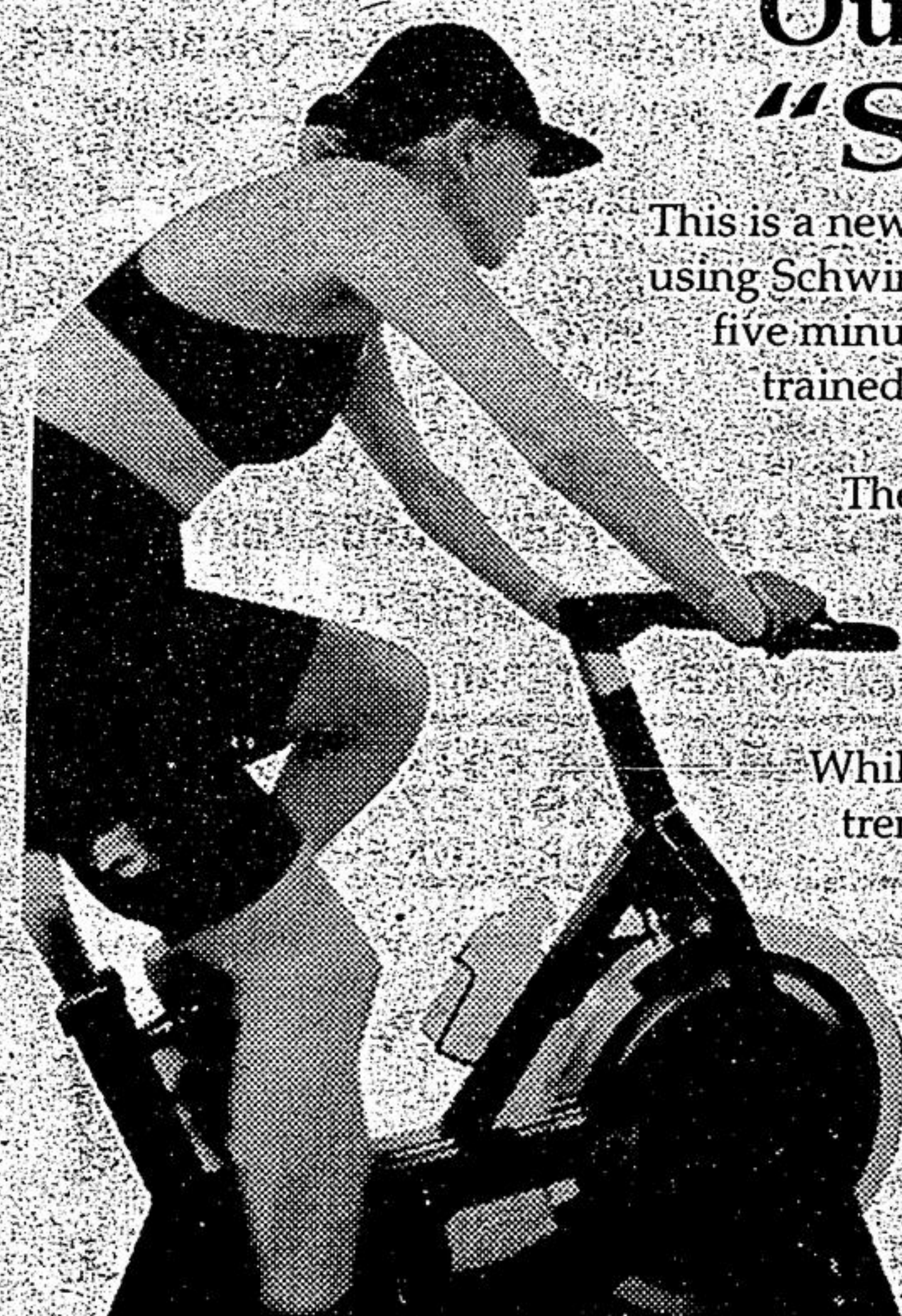
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