



Every day in the United States 117 people die by suicide. For me, this was just another sad statistic until April 15, 2013 when my 24 year old nephew died by suicide. My world and that of my family was instantly changed forever. A piece of our collective hearts was deeply wounded. The intensity of our grief, anger, sadness, guilt, and despair consumed us for days and weeks and still simmers just below the surface.

During my first week at Our Family Services and while reading information on my new community, I gasped when I read that Arizona has the 13<sup>th</sup> highest suicide rate in the country and Tucson the 3<sup>rd</sup> highest rate of US cities. For a few brief moments, I stepped back into the pain of April 15<sup>th</sup>. My heart ached for the thousands of individuals and families who each day joins the club in which none of us would ever choose to be members - suicide loss survivors.

September 5 – 11 is National Suicide Prevention Week. Let us each take this week as an opportunity to have a conversation about suicide. Let's bring this somewhat forbidden conversation out of the darkness and into the open. Let's start with a quick review of some suicide facts:

- For every completed suicide there are 25 attempts.
- In Arizona suicide is the 2<sup>nd</sup> leading cause of death for people ages 15 – 34.
- Suicide risk increases with age. Currently, the age group with the highest suicide rate in the U.S. is middle-aged men and women between the ages of 45 and 64. The suicide rate is still highest among white men over the age of 65.
- In U.S. surveys, lesbian, gay and bi adolescents and adults have two to six times higher rates of reported suicide attempts compared to comparable straight people.
- In Arizona almost four times as many people die of suicide than by homicide each year.
- Women attempt suicide 3 times as often as men; men die 4 times as often as women from their attempts.

So what causes suicide? According to the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention:

*There's **no single cause** for suicide. Suicide most often occurs when **stressors exceed current coping abilities** of someone suffering from a mental health condition. Depression is the most common condition associated with suicide, and it is often undiagnosed or untreated. Conditions like depression, anxiety and substance problems, especially when unaddressed, increase risk for suicide. Yet it's important to note that most people who actively manage their mental health conditions lead fulfilling lives.*

What to look for:

- Appearing depressed – withdrawn, sad, change in mood, appearance, school or work performance, appetite, hygiene
- Distancing self from others and from routines and activities
- Verbalizing a feeling of wanting to die, being a burden to others, not being able to cope anymore, feeling hopeless or helpless about their problems
- Giving away possessions, making final plans, saying goodbye

- Increase in self-destructive behaviors like drug or alcohol use, unsafe driving, unsafe sexual partners

What to do:

- Point out what behaviors you see
- Tell them you care and want to help
- Ask directly about suicidal thoughts and plans
- Listen patiently and nonjudgmentally
- Acknowledge and validate their emotions and needs
- Don't judge their feelings, invoke guilt or shame, give advice, or offer solutions
- Link them with resources (family, friends, professionals) who can help support them
- Get support for yourself

At Our Family Services, we care deeply about the troubling suicide statistics in our community and more importantly, we care about the lives behind the numbers. Our Family serves two of the populations most impacted by suicide - youth and elders. As we work to make our community a better place to live, to grow up, and to grow older, we must all do our part to ensure that all members of our community see their value and to have hope.

If you or someone you know is in an emergency, call The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255) or call 911 immediately. See more at:

<http://www.nami.org/suicide#sthash.GE2GI37c.dpuf>

World Suicide Prevention Day - On September 10, 2016, we observe World Suicide Prevention Day to reach out to those affected by suicide, raise awareness and connect individuals with suicidal ideation to treatment services. It is also important to ensure that individuals, friends and families have access to the resources they need to address suicide prevention. See more at: <http://www.nami.org/Get-Involved/Awareness-Events/Suicide-Prevention-Awareness-Month#sthash.zy99yUGA.dpuf>

Join me in learning more and how to make a difference. Visit the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, [www.afsp.org](http://www.afsp.org), or Suicide Prevention Alliance of Southern Arizona, [www.tucsonsuicideprevention.com](http://www.tucsonsuicideprevention.com).