

From the Desk of JEFFERY A. SHOCKLEY-ES4796

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How Suicide is Prevented Within Prison Confines

I have been serving time since 1999, Philadelphia County and arrived in the state prison system (SCI-Houtzdale) the day before 9/11/01. It was such a shock to learn that someone who had been doing this for a lot longer than I took their own life. At the time it was not about did I know the person, were they someone close to me? Word travels around here pretty quickly and news about so-and-so "hanging it up" made it around to my hearing and I was saddened by it.

I was starting a life sentence and the hope that one day I may be able to return to society is that motivating factor, and family support, that helps me fight to make it through, if for just one more day. Suicide is such a profound and important topic to address, "How Suicide is Prevented". By recognizing a suicidal persons cries for help and offering them hope through talking about the positives life has to offer is one way suicide can be prevented.

The very idea that someone wants to die is exceptionally frightening and difficult to understand. However, we as our brothers keeper must overcome the reluctance to become involved. By bringing this toipic to the forefront of discussion, is awareness which starts the hope in someone struggling. Being more involved can change that instance of thought and/or attempt at suicide, making it preventable.

Suicide is the most complex and difficult to understand of all human behavior, however, not wanting to live is an idea most of us could not fathom under normal circumstances and operations of the mind. For suicidal individuals, just enjoying life is a struggle, filled with turmoil. It takes work trying to enjoy a day and finding hope in a better tomorrow, even with their knowledge that all things change with time.

Suicide is prevented when we can share that often hidden hope we experience in even the most common of tomorrows with someone struggling with the idea of not wanting to live today. The difference between the two is in that moment of great difficulty, we can help each other deal with situations that will pass and not result in such life altering decisions. We can be the first lifeline to those who are being overwhelmed by the problems they are experiencing and see suicide as the only solution, unable to see any other.

How do we know when someone is having such ideologies? By paying attention to the people around us, especially those who tend to stand alone. Where they used to play cards, Chess, or going to yard regularly in the past. For the person who was once very phone driven, not making any calls in a little while, giving their personal items away to get their affairs in order. These can just be some signs that something in their life has changed and not for the better. Who can know when someone may have had a bad phone call, letter or parole rejection? Perhaps someone may feel like the time that have to do is more than they can handle; imagines today

where they lose loved ones in those far away tomorrows because of having so much time to do.

Suicide is prevented when we get involved. Giving hope, no matter the crisis happening or the news that has come in, they can know someone stands with them. It has been my own experience as a Certified Peer Support Specialist (CPSS) that sitting with, and talking and listening to a person means a lot. In this environment of prison each day can bring about overwhelming situations that saps the energy. The sense of having no control; will the prison or the individual's cell get a shake down today, will I be transferred further away from family and not forgetting the ever changing attitudes of corrections staff, making the weight of time much more depressing than any day before incarceration. Some people struggle with this in a painful silence.

In our current system, suicide has been demonized as a cultural taboo; that just asking someone about feeling suicidal can be difficult. In the prison culture, minding your own business, is a Cardinal Rule, especially when it comes to suicide prevention. Fortunately, a process known as 'Question, Persuade, Refer' (QPR) was introduced as an effective way to cordially address the forbidden with someone who may be in that struggle. QPR engages us with them, by asking what may be a life saving question without judgement or opinion.

We can ask open ended questions, these are questions that warrant more than just a No or Yes response and gives the person some hope that another person is listening. "What is going on to make you feel this way?" "What is it that I can do to help you through this moment?" "If you had the chance what would you like to do or say to you parent, child, sibling, partner?" "How would you change the operation of the institution if you were in charge?" Examples of questions I have asked some along my time as a CPS worker.

Many of us may never live life that focused on one particular troubling element that can bring into mind that thought of wanting to quit life, however, today with technology, situational depression and other factors, statistics have shown that mental health remains such an ever evolving component that is ever more paramount to pay attention to each other and ask the hard question if someone is or has been thinking of committing suicide or other forms of self-harm.

Sometimes suicidal individuals will agree to get help, but don't, for reasons that may not be clear to those offering the help and referrals. Some may even use the cry for help to gain others attentions which causes frustration for those wanting to be a help. However, we must remain strong and give the attention; be there to help prevent suicide. Ask yourself, if you were angry, overwhelmingly depressed, or otherwise upset. Would you want those who you love you to just stand by while you killed yourself? Probably, No!

It is important to persuade someone to get help, and refer them to proper Mental Health Provider(s). This will take much courage to do. Be someone to help another, and this is how we can prevent suicide. Suicide thoughts are real and we cannot be foolish to think our neighbor, friend, or even Correctional Staff do not struggle at times with such ideologies. I myself, the author of this essay, have attempted suicide by cutting my wrists the night of taking an innocent life.

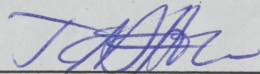
That I would do such a thing was more than I could handle at the time and I did not want to live. There was a Mental Health Professional who listened and gave suggestions on how to live

beyond myself. That even though this terrible thing happened to an innocent person, what if I lived in honor of them and not myself. To do something worthwhile with the life there was to live. Start this journey toward recovery that can be a help to others and prevent suicide.

How suicide is prevented is by listening and being aware of those around us. Being present beyond ourselves because in this way we can be of service to each other; helping each other and grow beyond the hurt and pains that drive some of us to feel as though suicide is the only solution. When there is so much more to love and live for. This is how suicide is prevented.

Don't keep suicidal thought to yourself.
You are not alone.
Talk to someone.
There is Certified Peer Support Specialist nearby.

Thank you,

/s/ 

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