



Orange County Chapter

CALIFORNIA CHAPTER 4

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*"To ensure optimal health
for all Orange County
children by promoting
pediatric excellence."*

For Immediate Release:

February 9, 2018

The community of Orange County, California is suffering greatly in these early months of 2018. Suffering in silence and filled with emotions of worry, confusion, anger, fear and great sadness over the deaths by suicide that have claimed the lives of 3 teenagers within the past 3 weeks.

Many are beginning to wonder out loud, "What is going on in our community?" Some have asked, "Were there warning signs?" Others have questioned, "What can be done to prevent this from happening again?"

We want to tell every worried parent and teen that **WE HEAR YOU**. We want to assure every teacher, coach and administrator that **WE ARE LOOKING FOR ANSWERS TO OFFER GUIDANCE**.

The American Academy of Pediatrics – Orange County Chapter, in collaboration with local and nationally-recognized sport psychologist, Casey Cooper, Ph.D. came together to provide the following insights.

It is critical that we recognize that there is **NO** singular cause or preventative measure that could have been taken to prevent these recent tragedies. No family member, friend, teacher, coach, administrator or health care provider can identify why these talented and amazing teens felt such a level of pain and despair that taking a permanent step to end their pain seemed warranted.

As we consult with experts, it is becoming clear that meeting the social demands teens believe are placed upon them is a very real and often hidden distress factor and it can increase youths' risk of suicidal ideation. In the days, weeks and months ahead, we will be discussing how to combat those high stress messages and instead help teens understand that success is measured by so much more than an A on every test, or a championship season. More importantly, it is creating a sense of who they are, who they might become, and a belief that, like everyone, they are someone who matters!

During the wait for conclusions to be drafted and research to be properly collected, we offer the following reminders.

- **The face of suicide is changing. The rate of suicide is increasing in Orange County and all teenagers are at risk, including those high achieving students, athletes, and artists.**
- Suicide is the second leading cause of death for young people ages 10 -24.
- Teens at risk for attempting suicide cannot always be identified in a single screening.
- Due to the impulsive nature of teens, their age group is at higher risk to make sudden attempts on their lives, seemingly without warning.

We want to address the impact of perfectionism among performance driven teens in academics, the arts, and athletics in Orange County. We believe this is a critical factor to identifying and intervening with "the new face of suicide".

- **Research now confirms that current generations of young adults put more pressure on themselves than generations before them.**
- **This self-imposed pressure to be perfect is a known risk factor to considering suicide. An environment where success is so highly valued fuels this pressure on our teens.**
- Intolerance for mistakes and weakness make teens high achieving in academics, athletics, or the arts particularly vulnerable to social isolation when their self-imposed perfectionist standards are not met.
- Pursuing perfection decreases the likelihood that these teens will seek help from others.



Orange County Chapter

Our community is beginning to take next steps. More information and response suggestions will be forthcoming. In the meantime, please consider the following:

- Monitor your teen's social media presence and exposure.
- Communicate with your school and district's student service department professionals to locate a suicide prevention program to attend for advice and support.
- Research tools for empowering personal best strategies as a way to guide a perfectionist driven child.
- Honor the relevant codes of conduct and sportsmanship whenever you attend sporting and performance-based competition.
- Find mental health professionals and support tools for adolescents who express concerns with not measuring up to unrealistic standards of success.
- Check in with your teen about what stresses they may be experiencing during a calm time. Ask specifically what they feel you expect of them, as this can be an opportunity to correct self-imposed perfectionism.

Most importantly, for our teens, they need to hear and believe these key messages:

- YOU ARE MORE THAN YOUR ACHIEVEMENTS and YOU MATTER TO US
- You cannot be defined solely by your skills in the arts, academics, or athletics
- You might feel it's safer to discuss your feelings on Social Media, but this only isolates you further.
- Social media provides instant feedback that accelerates any insecurities, rigid thinking or negative thought spirals. It's not driven by parent messages; it is technology driven and makes you vulnerable.
- You are not alone and your feelings are shared by others, even if they don't show it
- When you feel most isolated, there IS a community here to support you. CHECK IN and TALK with a trusted adult when you feel hopeless.
- People are waiting for you to CHECK IN with them, 24 Hours a day. **1-800-273-8255**

For more information:

With Hope Foundation: <http://www.withhopefoundation.org/>, (714) 524-1996

Suicide Prevention Resource Center: <https://www.sprc.org/>

Society for the Prevention of Teen Suicide: <http://www.sptsusa.org/>

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