

There is Help, There is Hope: Save a Life by Recognizing the Suicide Warning Signs

by Richard Egan



September is designated as National Suicide Prevention Awareness Month. In the State of Nevada we are 11th in the nation in the Suicide Rate, 10 other states have a higher rate than us. Prior to 1999, Nevada was #1 in the nation when it came to suicides. From 2000-2010 we fluctuated between #1 and #5. We steadily moved down the list, getting as low as #11 in 2015, in 2016 we slipped back to 5th but recovered back to 11th in 2017, in the “Crude Rate”. Nevada was the only state in the United States to reduce its suicide rate between 2000 and 2016. We are reducing our suicide rate slowly, but we are reducing it!

The Suicide Rate among our youth is midline, we as a state have been historically proficient in this area as we are 24th in the suicide rate among our youth 19 years old and under. In 2018 our youth suicides increased 90% in Clark County. We know our foster youth are most at risk for thoughts of suicide, but in addition they are our most protected when in the care of DFS and DCFS. The higher risk comes when our foster youth leave the protection of the system and their thoughts of suicide were not addressed. In other words we physically protect them without addressing their thoughts of suicide. When we look at suicides for youth age 18 to 24, we see many were in foster care during their childhood.

We are building a tiered system of training in our communities. First we want to bring awareness to suicide through prevention walks, conferences, and Suicide Talk Training (suicide awareness). Along with the awareness we want our community members and foster youth treatment team members to be alert to suicide by being trained in GateKeeper (for Family Support Agencies to Meet the NRS requirement for their foster parents) or safeTALK (suicide alertness) (for DFS/DCFS Foster Parents). The next level of suicide prevention training is an intervention class called

ASIST (suicide intervention) and this class will teach you how to complete a suicide intervention (with Assessing the Risk and building a Safe Plan with them) The state will be adding additional classes as they become available.

Sixty to seventy percent of all suicides include mental health concerns, so we have added Youth Mental Health First Aid (YMHFA) classes. In addition, we offer Adult Mental Health First Aid (AMHFA) classes.

All of these training programs come with certificates and Continuing Education Credits you can use towards your 12 hour recertification hours. Talk with your Licensing Worker about adding these to your courses you take next training cycle. I recommend these courses be taken for any foster parent who cares for any youth over 8 years old.

An additional program we have in our state in Reduce Access to Lethal Means. Why address this controversial subject? 51.1 percent of the suicides across the nation are completed with a firearm. In Nevada 51.3% of the suicides are completed with a gun. From the Office of Suicide Prevention, this program is to talk about firearm security. This is an addressed concern when it comes to foster homes as firearm/medications security guidance is provided to you. The concern is when your biological or foster children visit other homes which do not have the firearm/medications security guidance which DFS/DCFS has provided.

The program reduce access to lethal means includes five key components: (1) Design and reproduction of printed materials, posters, brochures and wallet cards. (2) Purchase gun locks for distribution during community events. (3) Outreach to relevant community members/agencies to include parents, public, gun shops, gun ranges, firearm distributors, firearm retailers, attendees at gun shows, and individuals who are firearm owners. (4) Educating gun shop owners and employees on suicide

prevention and intervention trainings available and the effect of lethal means on Nevada's suicide rate. (5) Directly educating parents on lethal means restriction and other suicide prevention techniques through community-based outreach.

The Nevada Coalition for Suicide Prevention (NCSP) partnered with the Office of Suicide Prevention (NOSP), Nevada Firearms Coalition (NVFAC) and the Executive Committee to Review the Death of Children to develop a comprehensive public information and education materials around suicide prevention through securing firearms. We are currently distributing materials statewide. Materials have been shared with the Clark and Washoe county gun shops, shooting ranges, and firearm training centers, Division of Child and Family Services, Nevada Department of Education, and the Washoe and Clark County School District.

suicideTALK

Ranging from 90 minutes to a half a day, suicideTALK invites all participants—regardless of prior training or experience—to become more aware of suicide prevention opportunities in their community. Dealing openly with the stigma around suicide, this exploration focuses upon the question "Should we talk about suicide?" By looking at this question in a number of different ways, session members can discover some of the beliefs and ideas about suicide in their communities—and in themselves. suicideTALK participants learn...

- How suicide is a serious community health problem that is often misunderstood
- How personal and community beliefs about suicide affect suicide stigma and safety
- How the steps taught in LivingWorks' safeTALK program can be used to help prevent suicide
- How to get involved in life protection, preservation, and promotion activities in the community

safeTALK

safeTALK is a half-day alertness training that prepares anyone over the age of 15, regardless of prior experience or training, to become a suicide-alert helper. Most people with thoughts of suicide don't truly want to die, but are struggling with the pain in their lives. Through their words and actions, they invite help to stay alive. safeTALK-trained helpers can recognize these invitations and take action by connecting them with life-saving intervention resources, such as caregivers trained in ASIST.

Since its development in 2006, safeTALK has been used in over 20 countries around the world, and more than 200 selectable video vignettes have been produced to tailor the program's audio-visual component for diverse audiences. safeTALK-trained helpers are an important part of suicide-safer communities, working alongside intervention resources to identify and avert suicide risks.

Training features:

- Presentations and guidance from a LivingWorks registered trainer
- Access to support from a local community resource person
- Powerful audiovisual learning aids
- The simple yet effective TALK steps: Tell, Ask, Listen, and KeepSafe
- Hands-on skills practice and development

safeTALK helps expand the reach of suicide intervention skills in communities around the world. Watch this video from the Ontario Hockey Association, one of the many organizations that have implemented safeTALK, click the links below to participate in or support this life-saving program.

ASIST

Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST) is for everyone age 16 or older—regardless of prior experience—who wants to be able to provide suicide first aid. Shown by major studies to significantly reduce suicidality, the ASIST model teaches effective intervention skills while helping to build suicide prevention networks in the community.

Virtually anyone age 16 or older, regardless of prior experience or training, can become an ASIST-trained caregiver. Developed in 1983 and regularly updated to reflect improvements in knowledge and practice, ASIST is the world's leading suicide intervention workshop. During the two-day interactive session, participants learn to intervene and help prevent the immediate risk of suicide. Over 1,000,000 people have taken the workshop, and studies have proven that the ASIST method helps reduce suicidal feelings for those at risk.

Workshop features:

- Presentations and guidance from two LivingWorks registered trainers
- A scientifically proven intervention model
- Powerful audiovisual learning aids
- Group discussions
- Skills practice and development
- A balance of challenge and safety

ASIST has saved and changed hundreds of thousands of lives around the world.



What is Mental Health First Aid?

Mental Health First Aid is an 8-hour course that teaches you how to identify, understand and respond to signs of mental illnesses and substance use disorders. The training gives you the skills you need to reach out and provide initial help and support to someone who may be developing and mental health or substance use problem or experiencing a crisis.

Mental Health First Aiders Are...

Teachers, first responders and veterans. They're neighbors, parents and friends. They're people in recovery, and those supporting a family member. Mental Health First Aiders are anyone who wants to make their community healthier, happier and safer for all.

Mental Health First Aid Matters...

Most of us would know how to help if we saw someone having a heart attack—we'd start CPR, or at the very least, call 9-1-1. But too few of us would know how to respond if we saw someone having a panic attack or if we were concerned that a friend or co-worker might be showing signs of alcoholism.

Mental Health First Aid takes the fear and hesitation out of starting conversations about mental health and substance use problems by improving understanding and providing an action plan that teaches people to safely and responsibly identify and address a potential mental illness or substance use disorder.

When more people are equipped with the tools they need to start a dialogue, more people can get to the help they may need. Mental Health First Aiders can even save lives.

Mental Health First Aid was created in 2001 by Betty Kitchener, a nurse specializing in health education, and Anthony Jorm, a mental health literacy professor.

Kitchener and Jorm run Mental Health First Aid™ Australia, a national non-profit health promotion charity focused on training and research. The United States is just one of the many countries that have adapted the program from Australia.

Get Involved

You can learn more about these and many more initiatives at Nevada Coalition for Suicide Prevention's website. Or, feel free to contact Richard Egan directly at 702-486-8225 or e-mail at egan@health.nv.gov.

Richard Egan is the Southern Nevada Suicide Prevention Training and Outreach Facilitator for Division of Public and Behavioral Health with the Dept. of Health and Human Services. Throughout his career, Egan has provided leadership, supervision and suicide prevention for more than 700 people. He also spent 26 years in the U.S. Air Force, retiring with the rank of senior master sergeant.