

In a world bombarded with sensationalized headlines, important messages that should grab our attention can become background noise. Such is the case with teen suicide. This hit hard when just recently, I was informed of three teens who took their own lives. I consulted on two other cases of attempt suicide. If all the clinicians working at The Buckeye Ranch were polled, there would be several more, given that there are as many as 100 unsuccessful attempts for every completed suicide.

Statistics rarely draw someone's attention, but they do reveal important facts. The truth is that youth suicide rates *tripled* between 1950 and 1990. In spite of a decline over the past 20 years, rates have leveled off and youth suicide rates are more than double what they were in 1950. Suicide is the third leading cause of teen deaths. Within a typical high school classroom, it is likely that three students have made an attempt in the past year. In a nationwide survey of high school students, over 16% reported seriously considering suicide, 13% report creating a plan, and 8% report trying to take their own life at least once in the past 12 months.

We must ask ourselves "what is happening?" that makes the life experiences of teenagers challenging enough to choose suicide. Economic fears, family instability, unrelenting media pressures, and 24-7 access to social scrutiny and peer pressure are unique to our modern world and are experienced by teens with a level of intensity hard for adults to understand. Key parts of the adolescent brain needed for sound judgment are underdeveloped, making teens more impulsive and emotionally charged. Access to lethal means (such as drugs and firearms) sets the stage for tragedy.

The most common factor leading to youth suicide is depression. A study of Ohio youth deaths from 2007–2011 cited the following factors most frequently contributing to youth depression: family problems, arguments and break-ups with friends, school issues, drug and alcohol use, bullying, and other personal crises. Understandably, adults often see youth concerns as trivial and overly-dramatic. Although it is not possible or advisable for a parent to become involved in every problem their teen faces, it is essential that they maintain open and regular communication. This means listening and affirming emotional responses, even when you know concerns of the moment are relatively small in the larger scheme of life. For teens experiencing intense emotions, their current reality may be what drives their behaviors.

Learn the facts *before* your child shows signs of sadness or anxiety. Online resources offer information about warning signs and effective responses. The American Association of Suicidology's website is a good place to start (www.suicidology.org). If your child makes any statements indicating suicidal thoughts or plans, seek help immediately (and never leave your teen alone). Help is available through the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255) or at www.suicidepreventionhotline.org.

We know the teen years are difficult and youth today experience unique stresses. Be armed with the knowledge you need to prevent one impulsive act from destroying a life and a family.