

After high-profile deaths, local agencies offer tips on suicide prevention

After two high-profile national suicides within a week, local suicide prevention centers and call lines are emphasizing they are open and ready to offer support for those struggling with their mental health.

Working to avoid "copycat" suicides after the deaths of fashion designer Kate Spade and celebrity chef and television host Anthony Bourdain, advocates are asking suburban residents to be aware of signs of suicide contemplation and how to prevent the act itself.

Those signs include obvious changes in mood, giving away prized possessions, unnatural focuses on things like wills, or suddenly turning to religion and asking larger, philosophical questions, said Rick Germann, associate vice president of Amita Health, Alexian Brothers Center for Mental Health.

"Not everyone's sad. Some people become more hostile when depressed. They may have trouble with problem solving, change in sleeping and eating patterns, neglect of self-care; they may have trouble concentrating," said Cheryl Brown, Crisis Line of Fox Valley line manager.

Warning signs aren't always obvious.

According to Maureen Manning, director of Client Services at Community Crisis Center of Elgin, sometimes loved ones are surprised by a suicide attempt or completion.

Where to go for help

National Suicide Prevention 24-hour Lifeline: (800) 273-TALK

Crisis Line of Fox Valley: (630) 966-9393

DuPage County Crisis Intervention Unit: (630) 627-1700

Lake County Crisis Care Program 24-hour Hotline: (847) 377-8088

Alexian Brothers Center for Mental Health: (847) 952-7464

Community Crisis Center of Elgin: (847) 697-2380

Kenneth Young Center, Elk Grove Village: (847) 524-8800

National Alliance on Mental Illness for the Northwest Suburbs: (847) 899-0195

OMNI Youth Services in Buffalo Grove: (847) 353-1500

"Sometimes these individuals' spirits have lifted and their burdens do seem a little bit lighter before they attempt or complete suicide because in their minds, they've made the decision to end it all," Manning said.

Historically, there is an uptick in crisis calls after someone of celebrity status dies by suicide, according to Germann.

This was the case when Robin Williams killed himself in 2014. "His death shocked people. I think it scared some of our callers who have had suicidal ideations. They thought if he did it, what was going to stop them," Brown said.

Copycat suicides are also seen within individual peer groups, according to Manning.

Those around a person contemplating suicide may need to try to talk them out of it and then reference professional help.

Help can come from crisis call lines, group sessions, immediate medical treatment, or outpatient programs. Those helping someone who is considering suicide should stay involved in the process of achieving professional help.

"Say, 'Let's call the crisis center right now. I'm here, I'll see this through with you,'" Manning said.

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