

ANNENBERG ADOLESCENT MENTAL HEALTH INITIATIVE

One out of 10 adolescents in the U. S. struggles with a mental health problem severe enough to cause significant impairment, according to federal estimates. In an attempt to improve understanding, the Annenberg Foundation of the University of Pennsylvania brought together more than 100 internationally respected experts in adolescent mental health as part of its initiative to assess what is known and not known about this important public health issue.

Among the findings:

- Between 20 and 30 percent of adolescents report symptoms of depression. While depression once was considered an “adult” affliction, the mean age of onset today is 15.
- An estimated 1.1 million teenagers, ages 12 to 17, needed substance abuse treatment in 2001. Of that number, only 100,000 actually received it.
- Almost 9 percent of high school students have attempted suicide in the past year.
- Early diagnosis and treatment of mental health disorders increase the likelihood that the teenager can lead a productive adult life. And, most prevalent adolescent disorders are treatable. But delivery of treatment is by no means assured. For example:
 - Schools are the de facto mental health service delivery system for children and adolescents. But the level of services available is poor, and varies widely. Of 2,000 schools surveyed as part of this project, slightly more than half had full-time access to a mental health professional.
 - Primary-care physicians who can serve as a gateway to specialized treatment often are inadequately trained to identify and diagnose mental health problems, according to another study conducted. Many physicians express low confidence in their abilities to detect mental disorders among adolescents in their care.

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WHAT DOES TIME HAVE TO DO WITH GRIEF?

by Pat Schwiebert, R.N., Executive Director, Grief Watch.com

Everything. Just consider how, in “normal life,” our lives are run by the clock and the calendar. Some of us have a clock in every room so we can keep close track of the time. Few of us have the courage to live without wearing a watch because we’re afraid we might be late for something. Time is precious to us. We live in a society that reminds us that every moment counts, and some of us are masters at cramming as much activity as possible into every moment. And when we are grieving our experience still has much to do about time.

Time stands still. When we are grieving we may feel like the rest of the world is going on as usual while our life has stopped. Just last week, after my friend died, I passed a neighbor watering his lawn. He seemed totally unaffected by, and most likely unaware of Sarah’s death. How could that be? He only lives a block away. Didn’t he feel the same shift in the universe that I felt when she died? Doesn’t he realize someone really special is missing?

Time’s up. Most people will allow us about a one month grace period where we are permitted to talk about our loss and even to cry openly. During this time our friends will probably seem to be attentive to our needs. But when the month is up they may be thinking, if not actually telling us, that it’s time to move on, and that we need to get over “it”. They want us to get back to normal. We may be surprised how many of our friends (and relatives too) will become uncomfortable with our need to dwell on our sorrow. They may not appreciate that it takes time to readjust our life to the loss. Maybe what they are really saying is, “Time’s up for me to be able to be present to you in your grieving time.” Because of this we may need to redefine what is normal for us, and choosing some new best friends—friends who are willing and able to walk along side us on our personal journey of grief, and who will allow us to determine when our “time’s up”.

Doing time. Grief may make us feel imprisoned in our own version of hell. We won’t like who we are. We won’t like it that our loved one has gone. We won’t like it that our friends can’t make us feel better. We just want out of here, and we’re not sure we want to do the work that grief requires in order to be set free from this bondage. Some of us will remain in this uncomfortable place for a short time while of us may feel like we have been given a longer sentence.

Wasting time. Though in real life I pride myself in being a master at multitasking, in the land of grief I’m much less sure of myself. I find it hard to make decisions because, in my new situation, I don’t trust myself to make the right choice. I want someone else to be responsible if something goes wrong. Sometimes my wasting time is about not having the energy to get started. I am physically exhausted and my body refuses to make an effort to reclaim my former self. And I admit, quite frankly, that I’m not sure I even care enough about anything to make the effort. What’s the use, since it seems like everything I love sooner or later gets taken away from me.

Looking back in time. When we grieve we spend most of our time, at least at first, looking back. It seems safer that way. That’s where our missing loved ones are. If we were to look forward, that would mean we would have to imagine our lives without those we have lost. And that’s what we aren’t ready to accept—not yet. So we spend a lot of time thinking how we should have been able to prevent their dying, or wondering if we used our time with them well, as we remember the good times, bad times, silly and sad times. We think we have to keep those memories in front of us, or surely we will forget those whom we have lost.

First times. It is natural for us to gauge our life after a loss as we anticipate and then go through the first times – first day, the first week, the first month, the first time we venture out in public, the first time we went back to school, or church, or work, the first summer, the first Christmas, the first vacation, the first time we laughed. These first times are like benchmarks, notches in our belt that prove we are surviving when you weren’t sure we wanted to, or didn’t know we could.

Dinnertime. There’s an empty chair at the table. There’s the conversation that seems to be just noise, having little to do with the absent one about whom we are all thinking but not daring to speak. We still prepare more food than we now need because we haven’t yet figured out how to cook for one less person. Sometimes the food seems to have no taste, and is not able to do what we want it to do—to fill that huge hole within us.

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Time out. Sometimes what we need to do is to take a time out from our regular activities to reflect on what has happened to our personal world, as we knew it before our great loss. To do so is not to run away from life but simply to realize that to act as if nothing has happened doesn't work. The loss is too big to allow us to pretend that it hasn't had a big impact on us. It's in the quiet time, when we shut off our thinking and empty out the chatter in our head that the healing begins. Others will have to be okay with our need to bow out for a while. Remember that during grief our job is to take care of ourselves, not to take care of our friends. When it's time to re-enter a normal routine, it's our choice what we will reinstate and what we decide to lay aside. Loss tends to redefine our priorities. What used to be important may not be as important now. And that's not necessarily a bad thing. **Time heals what reason cannot.** In the end, time will change things. The intensity we experience when grief is new, where we can see nothing but our loss, and where every moment is filled with thoughts of the one who died will gradually diminish and become softer.

Time forces the big picture of life back into our vision whether we like it or not. This happens in our lives all the time. Remember how when we first fell in love with someone, we were totally preoccupied with only that other person, until gradually a more balanced existence was restored. Or when we did (what we thought was) some terrible thing and we were sure everybody would never let us forget it, we came to find out a few months down the road that most people had forgotten the incident. In the months (maybe years) following a loss, life will eventually start to re-emerge, and life on this planet will once again seem possible. This will not happen because we come to understand the death more clearly but because, with the passage of time, the unanswered questions will become easier to live with. Time will not remove grief entirely. The scars of our grief will remain and we may find ourselves ambushed by a fresh wave of grief at any time. But needing to know the answers to the "why" questions won't seem quite so important as it once was. Time is a gift that we have taken for granted. We've been given our lives one moment at a time. This is good, Peace to you.

*reprinted from the Cape Cod and the Islands Chapter of TCF.
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TEACHABLE MOMENTS CAMPAIGN

SPAN (Suicide Prevention Action Network) USA's Teachable Moments initiative utilizes grassroots advocacy and public education to emphasize that suicide should neither be a form of entertainment nor a marketing tool. It is a serious public health problem that touches hundreds of thousands of Americans annually. Through this initiative, SPAN USA and its advocates take action to help raise awareness about the impact that media can have—by partnering with and educating those in the media and entertainment industry to help encourage responsible portrayals of suicide, mental illness, and help-seeking behaviors.

SPAN USA believes that the **time** has come where responsible advertising and the impact of public messaging must be taken seriously. On occasion, well intentioned individuals and organizations make reference to suicide as a joke, sensationalize a suicide, or use it to help market a product or service. In most cases, these inappropriate representations stem from a lack of understanding about serious mental health issues. Unfortunately, these kinds of marketing campaigns and public portrayals of suicide can cause much harm and can unwittingly trivialize a very significant public health issue. What's more, such portrayals of suicide can not only counteract the work of suicide prevention groups, but in the worst case, could lead to 'suicide contagion', the clinical term for 'copy cat' suicides. SPAN USA has found that once individuals and organizations realize the enormous toll suicide takes on this country, and the impact their actions could have on an individual life, they are quick to rethink their public messaging.

In addition, there are also many positive examples of how the entertainment and media industries are currently being used to shed light on the problem of suicide and mental illness, and SPAN USA seeks to recognize these efforts. By praising and promoting these as positive portrayals, SPAN USA hopes to encourage others who are creating public messaging about suicide to do so responsibly.

For more information visit www.spanusa.org

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an excerpt from "Healing the Hurt Spirit" , Daily Affirmations for People Who Have Lost a Loved One to Suicide. by Catherine Greenleaf

September 17, Suicide Survivors Deserve Help

We've all heard the story. A 19-year-old son returns home from college and his parents find him in his bedroom dead, hanging from a rope. A year later, the father, wracked with guilt and shame, also suicides by shooting himself in the head. How can such a thing happen? Because the silence left behind from the initial suicide is like liquid acid. Unchecked it burns its way into the heart and minds of the survivors. Suicide is a self-destructive act. But so is ignoring the need for outside help as suicide survivors. Without help, the wheel of startling departures churns on, and can in some instances lead to multiple suicides within a single family. We have to believe we are worthy of help in order to muster the courage to ask for it.

Today, I deserve to ask for assistance, just like anyone else.



My experience after losing my younger brother to suicide

In 2002, I didn't know if I wanted to live. My brother Jeff (my only sibling) killed himself. I found him. I had nightmares for months. This was truly hell on earth for my family; each of us dealing with the most intense pain imaginable in our own way. My way was waking up each morning and wishing I hadn't; hoping this was just a terrible, sick nightmare, only to realize it was real. My younger brother Jeff was dead. I would never see him again. Never hug him, never jokingly squeeze his muscular arms, never laugh with him about silly things, never sit next to him at the dinner table on holidays, never again tell him I love him.

I spent the first few weeks waking up to a pain so intense, my chest hurt, I felt like I was suffocating. I had heard about heartbreak, thinking it was just a song topic, but this literally hurt my heart. I couldn't leave the house. I wore my brother's clothes so I could smell him. I listened to his music CDs he left in his car, so I could feel close to him.

One morning, as I lay on the floor, listening to his music, wearing his sweatshirt, I sobbed for what felt like eternity. I was paralyzed by pain. How could my brother do this? Didn't he love us and, more importantly, did he not know how much we loved him? How could he have chosen to end his life? He was smart, funny, handsome and had so much going for him. What was wrong with me? How could I not have known he was this depressed? I would have done anything to help him. The tears kept flowing. It was like all life, or the desire to live, was draining out of me.

Weeks prior, the night of his death, a brochure was left on our kitchen table. It was a brochure from Friends for Survival, a support group for those left behind after a suicide death. Could this be a group I needed? This can't be real. He was just gone and will be back soon, I thought to myself. This is some sick joke my brother is playing. Maybe I made it all up. This could not happen to my family. This is something that happens to other families, not mine. He'll be back---it's all in my head. This just can't be true. I put the brochure down.

Gathering up all the energy I had, I left my house to run simple errands, when a song came on the radio. It was a song we played at his service, called "I can only imagine" by Mercy Me. I couldn't

