

# Finding Hope: Fighting Depression and Suicide

When we think of taking care of our health the first thing that comes to mind is our physical well-being. We think about our blood pressure, our blood sugar, our cholesterol and the dreaded getting on the scale to check our weight. We may also think about the aches and pains we sometimes experience due to arthritis or overdoing the exercise. How often do we think about our emotional well-being? Have you ever thought about how your mental health has an impact on your physical health? Too much stress can cause issues with both blood pressure and weight. Society has conditioned us over the years to not discuss how we feel or if we are having any issues. Because we don't talk about it, we may tend to ignore changes in the behavior of our friends or family or even ourselves.

Under the umbrella of mental health issues there are many layers. It is not just one thing but various things that make up the category. Even when looking at a specific topic under the broad heading of mental health there are many layers. When diagnosing a mental illness there are many factors ranging from mood swings to erratic behavior to weight loss/gain or even loss of interest in what is going on around us. We are going to focus on two areas – depression and a by-product of depression – suicide.

Even under the topic of depression there are many layers ranging from the most severe clinical depression to something called situational depression due to some current event in our lives and a variety of things in between. Treatment for depression is necessary in the most severe cases but because there is such a stigma in society surrounding this topic, we are afraid to either seek help or let someone know we are struggling and are not sure where to turn. In the most severe cases hospitalization may be needed. Treatments may include medication or seeing a therapist or a combination of different therapies. Each of us needs to realize it is ok to ask for help. It may not be an easy thing to do but at times it is necessary. We should also be aware of what is going on in the lives of our friends and family. Have you noticed a change in their behavior? Have they shut themselves off from others? Where they once were ready to go at the drop of a hat but now make excuses for not participating?

Depression can happen to any of us at any time. The degree of depression is different for every person. There are those of us who have just received some bad news and feel blue for a day or two and then pull ourselves out of the funk. For others the blues last for much longer and become part of daily living and how this person looks at every encounter. For this person professional help may be needed. This is where the stigma placed on asking for help comes in and this person may not want to take this step for fear of being ridiculed or ostracized.

Unfortunately, sometimes when a person has not sought help or confided in a family member, suicide can be the result. Almost every day when we pick up the paper, listen to the news or see something while surfing the Internet, we see where someone has committed suicide. The stories include comments from family and friends like: "I never saw it coming", "I wish I had known", "Maybe I could have done something". When we hear about a tragedy such as a shooting in a school or workplace, the mental state of the shooter is questioned to try to figure out why this happened. Sometimes there were signs that were not caught but there are also those times when we are left to scratch our heads and wonder about what is happening in our society today.

Our goal with this program is for each of us to educate ourselves on what to look for in the people we meet. Each day we encounter people at work, at home, or when we interact with our friends. Have you noticed any changes in their behavior? Have they lost their zest for life? A simple phone call or a visit can go a long way to help others.

Did you know that suicide is the third highest cause of death for the 15 to 24-year age group?

Did you know that on average 20 military veterans commit suicide every day?

Did you know there is a National Suicide Prevention Hotline available 24/7? The number to call is 1-800-273-talk (8255).

Did you know that September is National Suicide Prevention Month?

Did you know May is the National Mental Health Awareness Month?

Some no-nonsense tips to help a person in crisis:

- Ask direct questions
- Listen to their answers
- Do a safety check
- Don't keep this a secret
- Ensure they seek professional help

Where to find resources:

- Go to the website for your county and look up Mental Health Services. I was amazed at what was there.
- Go to the Catholic Charities website for your diocese. There again a wealth of information.
- Arrange for a speaker to come to one of your meetings to talk about the services available in your area.

We are not asking to raise funds but to educate ourselves and to have frank and honest discussions with our families and friends. We have no idea what can come out of such a discussion.

During the year I will be sending out more information on different topics to share at your meetings and in your Institute newsletter. There is so much information out there I could end up writing 20 pages but will share in smaller doses.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact.

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