

Many uncomfortable feelings arise for individuals when it comes to discussing suicide, suicidal ideation, and mental health challenges with our youth. As a licensed clinician working with the youth in our community, I have witnessed these challenges and worked with families to address their concerns. These questions include, “how do I talk about this sensitive topic with my children/teens?” or, “what is the right thing to say and do? You are not alone in addressing these concerns. There is a network local professionals through CB Hope, and more, with steps being taken at the school to educate and prevent suicide.

Earlier this year the Colorado Attorney General Cynthia Coffman released an in-depth report on child and adolescent suicide rates in Colorado. The report’s findings concluded that rates of suicide are rising for children and adolescents within the state, and that Colorado has some of the highest rates in the country. Girls aged 10-18 are more likely to attempt suicide, while boys are more likely to succeed. Additionally, child and adolescent suicide is the third leading cause of death amongst children 10-18, according to the report.

Given the aforementioned, national evidence suggests that school-based suicide prevention programs can be a great tool for communities in educating our youth, supplying coping skills and healthy outlets, as well as empowering kids to keep an eye on their peers.

Crested Butte School is currently utilizing several evidence-based approaches to address these concerns. Elementary school counselor Stacey Petersen implemented a comprehensive curriculum focusing on building emotional awareness, coping skills, and assertiveness skills with the goal of empowering children to reach out to safe and trusted adults. The elementary school has also developed the Titan Traits Character Education program, an evidence-based approach designed to build optimism, grit, flexibility, gratitude, perseverance and purpose. (maybe a quote from Stavey??)

This year the middle school implemented the ‘Sources of Strength’, a youth suicide prevention program that “is designed to harness the power of peer social networks to contribute to a healthy school culture, ultimately preventing suicide, bullying, and substance abuse.”

In addition to utilizing this Sources of Strength Model, students in 6th and 7th grade participate in a six-week guidance curriculum that covers bullying education and conflict resolution, emotion management, and problem solving. According to Jennifer Read, school counselor, “we also give explicit instruction about Safe2Tell, and all sixth graders participate in Signs of Suicide, a suicide prevention program.” Safe2Tell Colorado is a hotline where one can leave an anonymous tip if someone sees or hears something having to do with the safety and well-being of an individual.

At the high school level, “we continue to see steps towards educating and empowering our youth. This past April the National Honor Society hosted a Mental Health Day, which covered information on stress-reduction, self-care, healthy relationships, mental health rights, suicide prevention and more. 9th graders go through the Signs of Suicide program again, but with slightly different curriculum to meet them where they are at developmentally.” The high school also

participates in an in-depth Health class that offers further educational information on mental health.

These programs and intervention models in place at the Crested Butte School are not only positive steps towards ending suicide amongst our youth, they are necessary. With summer approaching and kids schedules are changing to include more time at home, it's important to remember that communication within the family vital.

Conversations at home can start by acknowledging that this is a tough topic to discuss. Remaining open, humble, and calm can allow your child to feel safe and comfortable talking to you about these vulnerable topics. You don't have to know all the answers, and admitting that you don't can remind your kids that you are human. If you find yourself getting frustrated or overwhelmed, take a step back and allow those emotions to be a signal that it may be helpful to reach out to an outside source. For example the Center for Mental Health, the CB Hope Therapist Network, or the Crested Butte Community School.

Take your kids seriously if they mention anything that resembles suicidal ideation, or thoughts of suicide. I've heard people say, "I don't want to give my kids any ideas by asking the wrong questions or bringing this up." This is a misconception and in fact, if you can ask these questions or bring these difficult topics up than you help break the stigma of mental health, and help break the cycle of solitude and shame that can arise if someone is struggling with these thoughts. According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness and their StigmaFree campaign, normalizing mental health not only helps the individual and family, but helps communities as a whole.

Utilizing the supports of our community is an important step if you feel overwhelmed. You aren't alone. There is hope. You aren't expected to say the right thing all the time, and sometimes an outside source can be helpful for the entire family system. CB Hope and its network of providers and community members are willing to support, educate, advocate, and empower you.

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If you or a loved one is struggling with any mental health concerns, call the 24-hour crisis hotline at 1-844-493-8255, or text the word TALK to 38255. If you or someone you know is struggling with suicidal ideation, or an unsafe environment, you can make an anonymous tip through the Safe2Tell network at 1-877-542-7233. If you are unable to locate someone in a crisis, contact the local police department for a welfare check. Additionally, if you suspect weapons may be involved, please do not attempt to disarm the person. Instead, call the police at (970) 349-5231 or the Mt. Crested Butte Police at (970) 349-6516.