

If you or someone else is suicidal, or in case of any mental health emergency, call 911 or 211 for immediate assistance.



Organization raises awareness, helps to prevent suicide.

by Kim Seidel

“Joe was unique; he was his own person,” says his father, Dave Clements. “He was smart, loved music, and was a computer geek. He knew more about computers than his high school teachers. They told us that in parent teacher conferences.”

To the outside world, Joe was an ordinary teenager. But inside, he was battling depression. It proved to be more horrible than any of his loved ones could imagine. Joe committed suicide at age 19.

In a courageous effort to raise awareness and to prevent other families from experiencing the tremendous pain of losing someone to suicide, Dave and his family – wife Carlynn and daughter Sarah - established the Joe Was Just Joe Foundation.

Clements often tells others, “Suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem. If we can get people the help they need, we can prevent suicide.”

Within just two days of Joe’s death, Dave knew he had to do something to tell others about suicide and to stop others from making

the wrong decision. About one year later, the foundation began in 2009. “We named it, ‘Joe Was Just Joe,’ because we were always saying that, ‘Joe is Just Joe,’” Clements says. “He was a very unique person.”

For the past five years, Dave has visited schools and other organizations, and has assisted the La Crosse Area Suicide Prevention Initiative (SPI), a group that’s also worked diligently to raise awareness and hope in the community since 2004.

The Joe Was Just Joe Foundation helped to sponsor the first annual Suicide Summit, held for the past three years by SPI, along with an annual Suicide Awareness Walk each fall.

The foundation continues to be a major supporter of the summit. “We also sponsor scholarships for people who want to attend the summit but cannot afford the registration fee,” Clements says. “In 2013 we paid for 13 individuals to attend, many of who had lost a loved one to suicide.”

As parents, be aware of the signs of suicide, including the extra red flags to watch for in teens. It’s a myth that people who complete suicide don’t warn others. Eight out of 10 people who kill themselves have



given definitive clues of their intentions. They leave numerous hints and warnings to others, though some of their signals may be nonverbal or difficult to detect.

Those who are thinking about suicide give clues as cries for help. Many seek someone to rescue them from their thoughts of suicide.

It’s also vital for parents to know that the highest rates of suicide occur within about three months of an apparent improvement in a severely depressed state. An improved emotional mood doesn’t mean a decreased risk.

Suicide Warning Signs

- Giving away prized possessions
- Statements indicating a desire to die
- Statements of hopelessness
- Saying goodbye
- Making final arrangements
- Sudden changes in behavior
- Purchasing a firearm

- Depression for an extended period of time
- Alcohol abuse
- Drug abuse
- Stock piling of pharmaceuticals
- Going into isolation
- Threatening suicide
- Previous attempts of suicide

Source: *Joe Was Just Joe Foundation*

Additional Warning Signs to Consider for Teens

- Change in eating and sleeping habits
- Withdrawal from friends, family, and regular activities
- Violent or rebellious behavior, running away
- Drug and alcohol use
- Unusual neglect of personal appearance
- Persistent boredom, difficulty concentrating, or a decline in quality of schoolwork
- Frequent complaints about physical symptoms, often related to emotions, such as stomachaches, headaches, fatigue, etc.
- Not tolerating praise or rewards

Source: *American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*

What should you do?

Another myth is that suicidal people are fully intent on dying. Clements stresses again that suicide is preventable. Most suicidal teens want to live; they just are unable to see options to their problems.

If your child (or anyone you know) is considering suicide, the National Institute of Mental Health, recommends taking the following steps:

- Do not leave the person alone.
- Seek immediate help from your physician, the nearest hospital emergency room, or call 911.
- Remove any access the person may have to firearms or other potential tools for suicide, including medications.

Talk to your teen. Discussing suicide doesn't cause your child to consider it or make things worse. "Most suicidal people are truthful and relieved when questioned about their feelings and intentions," according to the website, CrisisLink.org. "Doing so can be the first step in helping them choose to live." **CPC**

For more information about the *Joe Was Just Joe Foundation*, visit joewasjustjoe.com, or email jwjffoundation@gmail.com.

Got Support?

Nearly a dozen groups that focus on mental health issues, including suicide, meet in the community to offer help, hope, and healing. A huge part of breaking down the stigma of mental illness and raising awareness is to join others who share similar journeys; to ask for help and to know it is OK to ask for help.

You can find comfort and courage in listening to others who have walked the same path and know you're not alone. You may light a way for others along the shared road, which beats sitting in the dark by yourself.

Survivors of Suicide, for friends and families of those who have lost a loved one to suicide, and Southwest Wisconsin Family Ties Support Group, for parents of children (ages birth to 21) with emotional/behavioral disorders, have doors open for you. Go to the La Crosse Area Suicide Prevention Initiative's (SPI) website to find more information on local support groups, including others for those who live with or whose loved ones experience depression, bi-polar, schizophrenia, panic/anxiety disorders, phobias, and high stress. The SPI site also offers opportunities to help in the fight against suicide. You can find information about events, tips, statistics, suggested readings, and other resources at: lacrossesuicidepreventioninitiative.com.