

Suicide – it doesn't have to be the final answer

By Kathryn Reed

“How can I support you to be here tomorrow?”

That one sentence could make someone realize they have a reason to live. Listening, being there – those are two of the more powerful antidotes to death by suicide.

So often when someone wants to end it all they believe they are a burden and that everyone around them would be better if they weren't in the picture. That person in distress needs to know they are loved, they would be missed, that they bring something wonderful to this world.

Still, as Alisa Merino with the Suicide Prevention Network said, “It's not your job to save them. You are not responsible if they die by suicide.”

That's the sad reality. For some people, they will seek the lethal way out no matter the other options presented, no matter what someone else says or does.

Suicide is nothing new. What is new is how people are talking about it. It's more out in the open. The stigma is slowly being erased. Help no longer involves a straightjacket and being locked up.

About 70 people showed up last week at Lake Tahoe Community College to hear what Merino had to say.

Most people who choose death by suicide have been depressed. It could be the loss of a loved one, the loss of a job, financial problems, drug issues – the triggers are limitless.

Merino stressed that it is imperative to ask direct questions

– even asking the person if they are contemplating suicide. Don't be worried about giving them ideas; you aren't, she said. And if they say, "yes" – don't leave that person. Call a hotline, get them to a behavioral specialist. If they are in imminent danger of hurting themselves, call 911.

Noticeable changes to eating habits, sleep changes and giving away possessions are signs someone may be thinking about suicide. They might start talking about death. Pulling away, becoming isolated is a normal precursor. Unusual risky behavior – which could even be driving under the influence – is another red flag.

Ask about how best you can support them. Be calm, neutral and non-judgmental.

"Suicide is messy, complex and it's hard to understand," Merino said.

It's something that touches every community. And when it does happen, those left behind often feel a tremendous amount of guilt and are left with questions that may never be answered. To help get people through this grief there is now a survivors of suicide support group that meets the fourth Thursday of the month at Barton Health's PR office in South Lake Tahoe from 6-8pm.

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Notes:

- Walk for Hope in memory of Emily Alessi is Sept. 10 at Lakeview Commons in South Lake Tahoe. Registration is at 9am, walk at 10am, barbecue at noon. Cost \$20 adults, 12 and younger free. All proceeds go to local suicide prevention services. (Alessi, a South Lake Tahoe resident, died by suicide three years ago at the age of 24.)

- Suicide Prevention Awareness and Mental Health 101 will

be presented entirely in Spanish on Sept. 12, 5-7pm at the Family Resource Center on Spruce Avenue in South Lake Tahoe.