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EDITOR'S PICK

SAFE FOR NOW: Suicide intervention workshop to teach community

Jessica Barnett 2 hrs ago



The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention lists suicide as the 10th leading cause of death among Americans.

For children ages 5–14, it's the third leading cause.

For those ages 15–24, it's the second.

No demographic is left immune or untouched.

"A lot of people probably don't realize this, but more people (die from) suicide each year than are killed in homicides," said Heather Kilgore, volunteer coordinator of Crisis Services of North Alabama. Kilgore oversees the 24-hour helpline at Crisis Services. The helpline is part of the National Suicide Hotline network, and the volunteers who run it undergo special training before answering calls.

As part of Mental Health Month in May, Crisis Services is partnering with the Mental Health Center of North Central Alabama, the Mental Health Association in Morgan County and the Foundation for Mental Health to make the training available to everyone in the community.

"Anyone at any point can be at risk for suicide," Kilgore said. "It only makes sense for people in the community to have these skills."

The Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training is a two-day, interactive workshop that teaches suicide first-aid. Kilgore said the ASIST model focuses not just on the views and experiences of those being trained but on using the "safe for now" method for suicide intervention.

"This model helps the interventionist focus on listening to that person's story, to try to find something in that person's story that might be a turning point to make them safe for now," Kilgore said.

She said part of the "safe for now" method is getting the person to think about what they can do to be safe for later and continuing what makes them safe now until professionals can step in or the person starts to feel better.

"It's kind of like when someone is drowning and you're a lifeguard," Kilgore said. "You're going to pull them out of the water and apply first-aid, but then the paramedics come in and take over or take them to the hospital."

Bill Giguere of MHCNCA said he knows from experience how vital such training can be.

"I can tell you from having to work in the field that the ability to identify and work with people in crisis is invaluable," he said. "You might literally save someone's life."

The research-based workshop is 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. May 30 and 31 at the MHCNCA administrative offices at 1316 Somerville Road SE, Suite 1, in Decatur.

One of the workshop's key features is small-group learning, so class size is limited to 30 people. Registration for both days is \$70, which includes lunch.

Submitting payment for registration through the PayPal link at www.csna.org will reserve one's spot in the workshop. However, it must be noted that the payment is for the ASIST training, not a donation to CSNA.

Continuing education credit is available for those who qualify at an additional cost through LivingWorks. For more information on registration or continuing education, contact Connie Kane of CSNA at 256-430-3336.

Those who wish to continue their training and become a volunteer crisis counselor for the 24-hour Crisis Services helpline can contact Kilgore at 256-716-4502 or heather@csna.org. Kilgore said ASIST workshops are offered three times a year, generally at the end of volunteers' six-week

training semester.

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