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EDITOR'S PICK

Free suicide-awareness training available

Sarah Pavlik-Hernandez Oct 6, 2018



The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention say suicide is the third leading cause of death for youth between ages 10 and 24, claiming the lives of approximately 4,600 young people each year.

“It is the most preventable form of death,” said Connie Kane, Crisis Counseling manager at Crisis Services of North Alabama.

That is why the organization, which serves Morgan, Madison, Limestone and Jackson counties, has launched a free suicide awareness and training program for schools, churches and other community organizations at the start of the school year.

“We can put a stop to suicide by creating a connection and asking the right questions,” Kane said. “We want students to know about our services in case they or one of their friends is contemplating suicide.”

Using a curriculum called QPR, which stands for question, persuade and refer, CSNA Suicide Awareness Educator Ian Krueger said he has already provided training to teachers and administrators in three Limestone County schools and has worked with the entire 10th grade class at Clements High School.

Funding for the training program comes from the Alabama Department of Public Health through the Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Act.

“I want QPR to become as common as CPR,” he said, explaining the training program takes about one to two hours per session and fulfills requirements set forth by the Jason Flatt Act. Signed into law by then-Gov. Robert Bentley in 2015, the act requires all public school personnel to receive annual training in suicide prevention and awareness.

Because it is an unfunded mandate, Kane said the fact that CSNA's suicide awareness training

program is free should make it appealing to schools and other community organizations.

The program's value, however, goes well beyond fulfilling a requirement. Krueger said it's about giving people the skills they need to step in and save a life.

“We start with asking open-ended questions to help people open up about their feelings and intentions,” he said. “Then we persuade by establishing positive relationships by using active listening to lead them to share what has happened in their lives to lead them to contemplate suicide.”

“You want them to be open and honest about how they feel,” Krueger added. “It takes a lot of courage to discuss something as intimate and scary as suicide.”

Krueger said he devotes a portion of his training to refuting some of the many dangerous misconceptions that exist about suicide, including the idea that if you ask someone if they are suicidal it will cause them to take their life.

“That is totally false,” he said. “Instead, asking the question removes the stigma that often accompanies suicide and relaxes that person because they know someone cared enough to ask.”

With approximately 3,041 young people attempting suicide each day, Krueger said people generally do not reach out because they have been ridiculed before.

“If they do say something, often they are told to get over it, that life is tough, you don't even have a mortgage yet so toughen up,” Krueger said. “They feel like they can't talk to an older adult about what they are experiencing.”

That is why the QPR curriculum includes training for youth, he said.

“Young people tend to turn to their peers when they are struggling, that is why it is important that both youth and adults undergo the training,” Krueger said.

Eventually, Krueger plans to train middle schoolers using an age-appropriate suicide awareness program called Kognito.

So far, Krueger said the response from educators who have gone through the training has been “very positive, with several sharing that the training gave them the knowledge and skills to confidently help students who have expressed a desire to self-harm.

For more information about CSNA's suicide awareness or any of their many other crisis intervention programs, call 256-716-1000.

If you or anyone you know is contemplating suicide call the 24/7 National Suicide Hotline at 1-800-273-8255.



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