

## Local News

# Teenage Suicide: Behind the smile of Reece Johnson

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### **(Interactive Media Not Supported by Print)**

BALDWIN COUNTY, Ala. (WKRG) - We delve deeper into teen suicide by looking behind the smile of 17-year-old Reece Johnson.

Bryan and Susan Johnson hope sharing their son's story will save the lives of others.

"I won't stand here and apologize for the choice that he made that brought us so much pain, sadness. All I can say is..I don't understand it," said Bryan Johnson as he and his wife, Susan, stood before a packed church February 17th of 2018.

Hundreds were gathered to celebrate the life of their son, Reece Johnson. Reece attended Fairhope High School where he made good grades and had a personality that naturally drew people to him.

Many of Reece's friends shared stories of his fashion sense, his infectious smile, and his ability to pull others out of dark places. Few realized the hurt he held inside.

"He was always going. He was always doing something. You know he was not a kid that sat still. He wasn't sitting around saying...oh woe is me. There was none of that, zero," said Reece's dad reflecting on his son's life nearly three months after Reece's Celebration of Life service.

Reece's parents agreed to share their painful story with WKRG News 5 in hopes that other families will recognize warning signs in their own children.

Bryan and Susan Johnson say depression and anxiety run in their family and Reece suffered from anxiety. He was in therapy.

He also had recent problems in school. Even though he had other scholarships in hand, he was nervous about an upcoming college interview.

One night in February, he came home intoxicated, locked his mother out of his room, and hanged himself.

"I saw Reece's feet. He was hanging in the corner," said Susan Johnson.

She continued, "I just screamed. I just screamed..and tried to hold my son up."

"He had actually said..once or twice...you know...said something about committing suicide and I discounted that and basically said...you can't go around saying that. Ok. Ok. That was my thought on it. You can't just say that. Ok. It was not even in the realm of possibility that he would ever do that...but, yeah. It was a big possibility for him and obviously, he did," said Reece's father.

Reece's closest friends and classmates at Fairhope High School talk about how giggly and happy Reece often was. Former girlfriend Paige Mackey said at times Reece could go to a dark place that she didn't understand, but, no one thought he would actually kill himself.

"The pain that you feel...I think pales in comparison to the pain that you cause by doing that and kind of just removing a bit of joy from everyone who knows you, you know?" said Mackey.

"All of us are distraught...like I think I can speak for everyone. It has completely broken all of us. I'm never gonna be the same person again. That moment I knew was the end of my childhood. I'm never gonna be a kid again. I've changed," said Evans Smith.

Friends and family are living with so much pain and regret and send a clear message to everyone.

"If someone actually says...I'm gonna kill myself...take them seriously. Take them seriously because you don't get a second chance sometimes," said Bryan Johnson.

"Somehow validate how they're feeling. Let them know. I may not understand, but I believe what you're saying. I wonder, you know, Reece said...I'm going to kill myself...but we didn't really believe it," said Susan Johnson who suggests getting immediate help for someone who threatens suicide.

As difficult as it is to talk about suicide to our kids, the Johnsons say we have to start conversations. Reece's dad has thought about what he would say to Reece today if he could.

"I am sorry. Forgive me. I love you," said Bryan Johnson.

Reece's parents and his friends believe he acted on impulse because he was so drunk, he registered .237 which is more than three times the legal limit to drive.

As difficult as it is for the Johnsons to go public with their story, they want to raise awareness. Reece is one of two suicides in Baldwin County this school year. There are many more attempted suicides.

According to information obtained by the Jennifer Claire Moore Foundation, the Baldwin County Board of Education district office has received 416 intervention forms for the 2017-2018 school year as of May 7, 2018. This means a student has been identified to exhibit unhealthy coping behaviors of self-harm, is exhibiting suicide ideation, or suicide attempts.

One of the suicide attempts involves an elementary school student transported from school to the hospital by ambulance because of an overdose.

Reece is one of two completed suicide attempts during the school year.

For information on warning signs and how to help a teenager who feels hopeless go to The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline website at: <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/help-yourself/youth/>

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention: <https://afsp.org/about-suicide/>

Alta Pointe Health Systems offers a Mental Health First Aid Training course.

[http://altapointe.org/wordpress/?alta\\_resources=mental-health-first-aid-training-courses](http://altapointe.org/wordpress/?alta_resources=mental-health-first-aid-training-courses)

You can speak to a counselor 24/7 through Lifeline Counseling Services at 1-800-273-TALK (8255).

[Http://www.lifelinesmobile.org/services\\_helpline.php](http://www.lifelinesmobile.org/services_helpline.php)

For emergencies, call 9-1-1.

To participate in upcoming Out of The Darkness Suicide Prevention Walk in Daphne, Alabama go to

<https://afsp.donordrive.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=donordrive.event&eventID=5442>

The Jennifer Claire Moore Foundation

<http://jennifermoorefoundation.com/resources/hotlines/>

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