

Suicide Warning Signs

Description

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September 27, 2017 Echo Magazine <https://www.echoak.com/2017/09/warning-signs/>

It has been said that suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem.

Like a lot of Alaska superlatives, the high rate of Alaska suicides was impressed upon some of us growing up in high-risk social circumstances. We were told by teachers and counselors that many people in Alaska have “issues” that could be so profound as to cause them to want to harm themselves. It wasn’t as much of a concern when I was in elementary and junior high school in Anchorage, but when my family moved to the bush, we found the reality of suicide in Alaska was not being exaggerated. It is a longstanding serious problem for small communities.

Today Alaska maintains one of the highest rates of suicide in the country.

The problem is so bad we have a Statewide Suicide Prevention Council. They publish information collected by the Alaska Bureau of Vital Statics. Collecting and distributing this data is necessary to bring awareness to the high rate of suicide in Alaska. It is nearly double what it is in the rest of the country. In the U.S. the suicide rate was 12.57 suicides per 100,000 population in 2013. In 2014 Alaska’s rate was 22.3 suicides per 100,000 people.

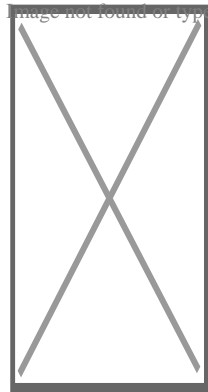
During 2014, 82.6% of suicides in Alaska were men, 17.4% were women. Alaska Native males died by suicide at a rate of 50.9 suicides per 100,000 people, which is nearly four times the national average!

A troubling reality

More than 90 percent of people who die by suicide have depression or other diagnosable, treatable mental or substance abuse disorder and an estimated 75 percent exhibit suicide warning signs.

[//dhss.alaska.gov/SuicidePrevention/Documents/pdfs_sspc/AKSuicideStatistics2015.pdf](https://dhss.alaska.gov/SuicidePrevention/Documents/pdfs_sspc/AKSuicideStatistics2015.pdf)

But those are just numbers; which do not show the profound effect and heartache suffered by the people left behind after a loved one has killed him or herself.



What can we do?

If you know someone is suffering, watch for warning signs:

- Appearing depressed or sad most of the time. (Untreated depression is the number one cause of suicide.)
- Talking or writing about death or suicide. (Writing a Will.)
- Withdrawing from family and friends.
- Feeling hopeless.
- Feeling helpless.
- Feeling strong anger or rage.
- Feeling trapped — like there is no way out of a situation.
- Experiencing dramatic mood changes.
- Abusing drugs or alcohol. (The need to escape reality.)
- Exhibiting a change in personality.
- Acting impulsively or recklessly.
- Losing interest in most activities.
- Experiencing a change in sleeping habits.
- Experiencing a change in eating habits.
- Losing interest in most activities.
- Performing poorly at work or in school.
- Giving away prized possessions.
- Feeling excessive guilt or shame.

The helpless feeling of losing someone who has taken their own life can be overwhelming and those closest might be inclined to blame themselves. But some people who die by suicide do not show any warning signs. They have become adept at hiding behind a fake smile, addiction, or a closed door.

Our public school teachers must now also be social workers!

New Alaska teacher certification requirements established as a result of AS 14.30.362 require mandatory training requirements for teachers, including for suicide symptom recognition and prevention. A new instructional module to help educators and others to recognize symptoms or circumstances leading to suicide has been released by the State of Alaska. The theme of this online course is: Overcoming Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) in Alaska Schools; Trauma and Its Impact on Learning.

According to the description of this training: “ACEs include abuse, neglect, and other household and community dysfunctions that may lead to biological changes in the brain and body of developing children and youth. These changes may make learning more difficult and have the potential to lead to lifelong health problems.”

[//stopsuicidalaska.org/](https://stopsuicidalaska.org/)

My own family was dysfunctional, but my parents didn't drink or use drugs. From what I have witnessed in Alaska since I was a kid, using substances to alter consciousness is one indicator of mental illness. Alaska's desperate level of alcoholism has now morphed into multiple substances—up to and including heroin—that serve only as a living escape from reality.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 1-800-273-TALK (8255)

Careline Alaska Suicide Prevention and Help Line 877-266-4357

Veterans Crisis Line 1-800-273-8255 press #1

Category

1. Uncategorized

Date Created

September 27, 2017

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