

A Father's Story About Teen Suicide

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Jason Reid is a father who lost his 14-year-old-son to suicide 18 months ago. In response to this tragedy, Jason created a website for parents and their children to learn more about suicide help at www.chooselife.org. When learning about this website, I interviewed Mr. Reid to better understand how families can support his mission of ending teen suicide in the United States by 2030. The website contains basic information about teen suicide, the national suicide prevention lifeline phone number at 1-800-273-8255, and website resources at www.suicidepreventionlife.org.

What the Data Indicates

According to Kirsten Weir cited on the American Psychology Association website at www.apa.org, there has been a 33% increase in the rate of suicides in the United States (US) from 1999 through 2017. Suicides are

the second leading cause of death for children and adults from ages 10 to 34 and the 10th leading cause of death overall. According to Ms. Weir's research, access to firearms in the US, a slow response to a national prevention strategy, and lack of affordable and accessible mental health care are key factors that have contributed to these worrying trends.

Jason's Analysis of the Problem

After his son's death, Jason learned that he missed the signals that his son was seriously depressed and used his phone to plan for his suicide. Since his son's death, Jason had dedicated hundreds of hours talking with the medical profession and families to better understand what he could do to have avoided his son's death. He believes that life for our teens today is more complex and stressful. Today's kids are bombarded with hundreds of television channels, computers, and computerized phones. Our children are anxious about global warming, wars, complicated social issues, and political disputes. Family dinners are fragmented with parents coming home late from long commutes and multitasking throughout the dinner hour. Everyone in the family seems to be on a different schedule which challenges families to spend quality time for dinner discussions and relaxing evenings.

Jason's Five Considerations That Can Save Our Teens from Suicide

We must not confuse having our children become worldly before their minds and bodies can adequately

process the information they are reading and viewing. We cannot assume our children can read and view everything that is available online and on television. Parents must set clear boundaries about what their children can watch and for how long each day. Best practices advocate to no more than an hour of screen time a day outside of the school day. That allows for time for physical activities, family relaxation, and family play.

Parents must understand that their teens will feel depressed at times. We should share our feelings with our kids even when we are feeling depressed or discouraged. Teens must learn that it is normal to have sad and happy days.

We can learn how to connect with our kids on their schedules even when it is not convenient. Parenthood is not convenient.

Families must simplify their lives to spend family dinners together, relax as a family, play crazy games, and just talk.

Kids, parents, family members, teachers, and neighbors are in this together. When we see that a child that is struggling, we need to take the time to talk with the child and tell the parents that there is a concern. The parents will thank you.

At the end of the day, your teen will know that there is someone who will talk to him at 2 a.m. in the night. Take the time today to play and talk with your children.

Much hope for all the families who care for our kids!

Mary Ann

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