

## **Suicide Prevention Week**

You don't have to be a trained professional to have a genuine conversation about mental health. Experts say that, in fact, just talking about it can be the first important step in understanding where someone is with their mental health, and helping them get support or treatment if needed.

The National Alliance on Mental Health is sponsoring National Suicide Prevention Week in the United States, as it has done the first week of September each year since 1975. The week started Sunday and runs through Saturday, and is designed to inform and engage health professionals and the general public about suicide prevention and warning signs of suicide. The campaign also strives to reduce the stigma surrounding suicide, as well as to encourage the pursuit of mental health assistance and support people who have attempted suicide.

Tanna McCullough, Family Nurse Practitioner at Lawrence County Memorial Hospital's Primary Care Clinic, said that largely due to a lack of services being offered, suicide is becoming more of an issue. "There is a shortage nationwide of behavioral health services, and it's preventing people from getting the help they need to treat depression," she said. "Therefore it goes untreated." Still, McCullough says, there are a number of ways for someone who is in crisis to seek help. "I would advise those who are feeling depressed or suffering with a mental health issue to seek counseling services," she said. "If someone is having thoughts of suicide they can call the suicide hotline 1-800-273-8255, or go to the local emergency room, or tell a family member or friend so they can get the help they need."

In Lawrence County, McCullough said, suicide is no more prevalent than it is anywhere else in the United States. The problem, she says, is that it's prevalent everywhere. "It has become an epidemic," McCullough said. She's especially concerned with the "alarming rates" of suicide in children. "They need to be screened on routine visits and also going into the schools," she said. "Early detection of depression is vital in preventing suicide." She also stresses that if you think someone might be in trouble, don't hesitate to intervene.

The National Alliance on Mental Health offers tips for helping someone who may be in crisis:

- Let people know you're willing to talk about mental health: The easiest way to do so is to be open about your own. Allow it to come up naturally in conversation.

- Trust your gut: If you think someone is having a hard time, talk with them privately. Start with an expression of care, followed by an observation. Normalize mental health by talking about it directly.

- Let them know you get it: Assure them that it's OK to struggle in response to life's challenges.

- The timing doesn't have to be perfect: If the moment's not right, it's fine to circle back some other time soon. Sometimes creating some space is the perfect thing to do. Let them know you can have a conversation at the right time.

- Don't let them hesitate: Let them know they're not burdening you. Let them know that you care, and that you're there for them.

- Someone else may be better: If you suspect they're uncomfortable, connect them with someone they may feel better talking with. Ask who else could be brought in to support them.

- Reassure them: Let them know that just because they're struggling now, they won't always be. Emphasize that getting help from a professional can truly make a big difference in their situation.

- A perfect ending: Reiterate that you're glad for the chance to connect. Remind them that we all have challenges, and that you'll continue to be there for them.