The Facts on Youth Suicide

Some First Nations, Inuit and Métis youth may be more at risk of suicide because of things like alcoholism, poverty, high unemployment, and the break-down of families that are all too common in our communities. These things impact how we feel about ourselves and our future.

Suicidal thoughts

For most people thinking of suicide, they experience thoughts like "I…"

- "Can't stop the pain".
- "Can't think clearly".
- "Can't see any way out".
- "Can't sleep, eat or work".

Suicidal thoughts can happen to anyone, whether First Nations, Inuit, Métis, or non-Aboriginal.

There is not one type of suicide victim. It happens to young and old, rich and poor. For this reason, it's tough to tell who is at risk of committing suicide, but there are some warning signs.

Someone might be suicidal if he or she:

- Talks about committing suicide.
- Has trouble eating or sleeping.
- Suddenly changes her/his behaviour (withdrawal, lack of interest, moodiness).
- Withdraws from friends and/or social activities.
- Loses interest in hobbies, work, school, etc.
- Has a mental illness/drug/alcohol addiction.
- Has attempted suicide before.

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What to Do

For yourself:

Talk to someone you trust. Things can seem very bad sometimes, but the crisis will pass. Ask for help. You can be helped. You can talk to a relative, friend, Elder, or counsellor in your community. If you are having difficulty talking to people you know, phone a crisis line. Kids Help Phone (1-800-866-8686) is a free, anonymous, 24-hour help line and the number won't show up on your phone bill.

Seek help. This is a list of the people in your area who can help you. If you don't know how to reach them, look in the white, yellow and blue pages of your telephone book or online.

- Kid's Help Phone – 1-800-668-6868 Free and confidential/private.
- Doctor/nurse/Community Health worker.
- Youth worker/counsellor.
- Elder.
- Youth Shelter.
- The Internet- Many resources are available online.

Seek Traditional Healing. Low suicide rates in First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities have been linked to strong traditions, customs, ceremonies and traditional healing methods that provide you with a sense of security, belonging and identity. Some Elders say we have lost our balance, control and harmony in our lives. Try reconnecting with your culture; it may be the first step to feeling good about yourself

Stop blaming yourself for everything. You are not at fault. If the conditions in your community are poor, your problems will appear to be much worse than they really are. Lower suicide rates have been linked to communities that have achieved self-governance and control over education, health, police, and other local services.

For a friend:

Take it seriously. Even if it is a child saying he or she wants to die, pay attention to them. At the very least, it requires a heart-to-heart talk, to show that you care.

Listen. Allow them to express their feelings. Ask questions about their feelings.

Be non-judgmental. Don't debate whether suicide is right or wrong, or whether their feelings are good or bad. Don't argue with them.

Show your concern. Tell them how much you care about them, and stay with them until they are out of danger.

Get help. Contact an Elder, counsellor, school counsellor, psychologist, doctor, etc. It may take years for a person to mentally recover from a suicide attempt or to embrace life after thinking about suicide.

When it's already happened…

If a relative or friend of yours has committed suicide, you might be blaming yourself. You might think that you could have helped or done more to help. You might be replaying the last time you saw the person, looking for any warning signs you missed. It is NORMAL for you to think and feel this way. But you have to know that when someone chooses to take their own life, it was a choice they made. You are not to blame for their death.

The Facts

- Suicide is the leading cause of death for First Nations people between the ages of 10 and 44.[1]
- Suicide rates among First Nation, Inuit and Métis youth are between five and six times higher than the non-Aboriginal youth population.
- Statistics show that 60 per cent of all Aboriginal people who attempt to and succeed in committing suicide are acutely intoxicated (drunk) at the time.
- Each year, on average, 294 Canadian youths (15-24 year-olds) die from suicide, which is ¼ of all youth deaths.

For more information visit www.honouringlife.ca or contact info@honouringlife.ca

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1 Health Canada. (2003). Statistical Profile on the Health of First Nations in Canada. Retrieved April 9, 2009 from http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fniah-spnia/pubs/aborig-autoch/stats_profil-eng.php

National Aboriginal Health Organization (NAHO)
Organisation nationale de la santé autochtone (ONSA)
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