

Mental Health America of Hawaii's Youth Suicide Prevention Project

A teen in Hawai'i is nearly twice as likely to attempt suicide as a teen elsewhere in the United States, with 2,280 reporting having attempted suicide here in 2007, according to a Centers for Disease Control survey in Hawaii's schools.

To reduce this tragic level of desperate depression among our teenagers, and increase the ability of peers, staff, and parents to recognize and intervene with depressed and suicidal teenagers, Mental Health America of Hawai'i has conducted focus groups and interviews with 150 youth from throughout Hawai'i about depression and suicide.

The discussions covered thoughts, feelings, attitudes and knowledge about depression, suicide and mental illness; coping strategies; risk factors; factors that build resilience; the impact of religion or spirituality on their beliefs; the influence of culture or ethnicity; and potential intervention strategies.

Sample comments:

- "Thinking about my daughter, my mom. I'm really trying not to hurt myself anymore. I'm really trying to kick myself from that habit. I walk, I swim..."
- "Some people fight or act outundefinedit is a way to cool off. But it isn't going to get rid of the depression."
- "I don't talk at all. I don't feel comfortable sharing that kind of stuff."
- "I don't want to put my problem on my dad. He already has too many of his own."
- "I used to cut myselfundefined6th and 7th grade. I was just trying to get it out. I was so mad. I was taking it out on myself."
- "Sometimes it's not that easy to talk about your problems. You no trust."

Most of the young people knew at least one person who had attempted or completed suicide (one had two cousins who had killed themselves). An even larger percentage of them had experienced a serious depression in their lifetime or had a family member who had.

Comments about how they cope with depression and suicidal thoughts

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The major recommendation from all of the youth in this study is that teenagers need someone who is willing to really listen to them. Almost 100% of the youth had never spoken about these issues before and were extremely grateful for the opportunity to do so through the groups MHA convened.

MHA has developed suicide prevention and intervention materials for youth and adults, which include:

- a training manual for teachers, youth workers, etc. that include case study role plays, signs and symptoms of depression/suicidality, training worksheets, and guidelines on how to do active listening, communicate empathy and support, ask questions in a nonjudgmental manner, reinforce the young person's reason for living, keep the person safe, and get them help
- poster
- DVD with powerpoint
- CD with audio of youth talking about depression and suicide
- resource information cards
- pamphlet
- backpack with Youth Suicide Prevention logo and crisis line number

If you would like any of these materials or to request a training presentation for your youth program, please contact Antonia Alvarez, 521-1846 or antonia@mentalhealth-hi.org.