

Suicide and its warning signs

The statistics are almost overwhelming. Suicide is the third leading cause of death for youth aged 10-24 in the United States, resulting in more than 125 deaths each week. Many people consider suicide an event that only happens “to someone else.” That couldn’t be further from the truth. Though it’s easy to think of suicide as a tragedy that happens to other families, it’s important to understand that suicide crosses all racial, economic, social, and ethnic lines. Suicide is preventable.

For every suicide, roughly 147 people are directly or indirectly affected by that death. That means that every week, over 18,000 people are affected by the suicide of a young person. In a year, almost a million people will be affected by youth suicide. Something must change.

That’s where the work of The Jason Foundation is so vital.

You may be wondering, *Who’s Jason?* Yes, The Jason Foundation is named after a person.

In the summer of 1997, Jason Flatt was an average 16-year-old. He loved his friends. He loved sports, especially football. A solid B-student, he was active in his youth group and was always up for trying new things. All that changed on July 16 that summer. On that day, Jason transitioned from student to statistic when he took his life.

Jason’s father, Clark Flatt, discovered his son at the family’s home that afternoon when he failed to reach him by phone. In the over 27 years since, Clark and the JFI staff have reached untold numbers of youth, educators, and parents through their work.

The Jason Foundation, Inc. (JFI) is a nationally recognized leader in youth and young adult suicide prevention and awareness. Its mission is to provide programs and resources for students, educators, parents, and communities to help recognize and assist young people who may be struggling with thoughts of suicide. JFI teaches the warning signs and risk factors of youth suicide so that everyone from peers to coaches to grandparents can get help for the young people in their lives who need it.

JFI refers to youth suicide as a “silent epidemic,” because so few people talk about it. They don’t discuss it among family members or with friends and colleagues. There’s a belief that if someone talks about suicide, then it plants the idea in a young person’s mind. The opposite is true. Talking about suicide doesn’t give someone the thought that ending their life is something to consider.

A frank, open, and honest discussion with your child about your concerns shows them how supportive you are in helping them cope with their feelings. Though death is an uncomfortable subject for many people, it is important to be able to talk about it openly and honestly. There should be no fear in talking to young people about suicide.

Approximately 80 percent of those considering suicide exhibit some sign of their intentions, either verbally or behaviorally. The following is a list of warning signs that a person contemplating suicide may present. It is, by no means, an exhaustive list.

- Talking about suicide
- Making statements about feeling hopeless, helpless, or worthless
- Deepening depression
- Preoccupation with death
- Taking unnecessary risks or exhibiting self-destructive behavior
- Out-of-character behavior
- Loss of interest in the things one cares about
- Making final arrangements
- Giving away prized possessions

Everyone needs to be aware of the warning signs associated with suicidal thoughts and know how to respond if someone's behavior causes concern.

JFI offers a variety of online training modules for anyone who wishes to utilize them. Staff will also visit schools, first responders, and several other community groups (live or via online streaming) to present information. The Jason Foundation has never charged any school, family, or community for the use of its programs or materials. This ensures that lack of funding is never a determining factor of who can obtain the information that could possibly save a life. Visit www.jasonfoundation.com for programs and resources.

The Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (call or text 988) is a free resource that is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, for anyone who is in suicidal crisis or emotional distress. A person may speak confidentially to a trained and caring crisis counselor for emotional support.

If you are experiencing a crisis, call 911 or go to your nearest emergency room.