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Contact:

Celeste Matheson
Director of Marketing
The Center for Youth and Family Solutions
cmatheson@cyfsolutions.org
www.cyfsolutions.org

Connection, Safety, and Hope: CYFS Behavioral Health Expert Shares What People Need to Know About Suicide Prevention

PEORIA, Ill. (September 2026) – September is National Suicide Prevention Month, a time to raise awareness, reduce stigma, and encourage meaningful conversations about mental health. The Center for Youth and Family Solutions (CYFS) is encouraging community members to recognize that suicide prevention begins long before a crisis and often starts with something simple but powerful: connection.

According to Stephanie A. Jones, LSW, a behavioral health professional with CYFS, many people mistakenly believe suicide prevention is only about crisis intervention. While emergency responses and professional support are critical, prevention also occurs through everyday acts of connection, compassion, and support.

"Many people who experience suicidal thoughts are carrying significant emotional pain," said Jones. "That pain may stem from trauma, grief, isolation, financial stress, health concerns, relationship difficulties, or major life changes. One of the most important things we can do as a community is help people feel seen, valued, and connected."

Recognizing the Warning Signs

Warning signs can vary from person to person, but may include:

- Talking about feeling hopeless, trapped, or like a burden
- Withdrawing from family, friends, and activities
- Increased substance use
- Giving away important possessions
- Significant changes in mood or behavior
- Expressing thoughts of not wanting to live

Jones notes that some individuals may even appear calmer or more at peace after deciding to end their life, making it especially important to pay attention to behavioral changes.



How Individuals Can Help

While professional treatment plays an important role, family members, friends, coworkers, educators, faith leaders, and neighbors can have a profound impact.

CYFS recommends:

- Listening calmly and without judgment
- Taking a person's concerns seriously
- Asking directly if someone is thinking about suicide
- Avoiding blame, shame, or dismissive responses
- Helping connect the individual with trusted support and professional resources
- Remaining with the person if there are immediate safety concerns

Helpful responses can include statements such as, "I'm glad you told me," "You don't have to go through this alone," and "I care about you and want to help you stay safe."

Prevention Starts Before the Crisis

Research and experience show that suicide prevention is most effective when communities focus on creating environments where people feel connected and supported before they reach a crisis point.

"It happens when parents make time to talk with their children, when schools create welcoming environments, when employers support employee well-being, and when communities reduce the stigma around mental health," Jones said. "Prevention is not just the responsibility of mental health professionals. It belongs to all of us."

In today's digital world, support extends online as well. A concerning social media post, text message, or online comment may be the first sign someone is struggling. Reaching out with a simple message of concern can make a meaningful difference.

Recovery Is Possible

Jones also emphasizes that suicidal thoughts, while overwhelming, can be temporary and treatable.

"Recovery is possible," she said. "People need access to treatment, but they also need hope and connection. Many individuals who struggle today go on to become advocates, caregivers, leaders, and sources of encouragement for others."



About CYFS Behavioral Health Services

The Center for Youth and Family Solutions provides a range of behavioral health services designed to support children, adults, and families across Central Illinois. Services include counseling, crisis support, trauma-informed care, and specialized mental health programs aimed at helping individuals build resilience, strengthen relationships, and improve overall well-being.

As one of the region's leading providers of behavioral health services, CYFS remains committed to educating communities, reducing stigma, and ensuring that individuals and families have access to the support they need.

If You Need Help

If you or someone you know is struggling or in crisis, call or text **988** to reach the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. If someone is in immediate danger, call **911** or go to the nearest emergency room.

About The Center for Youth and Family Solutions

The Center for Youth and Family Solutions is a nonprofit human services organization serving communities throughout Central Illinois. Through behavioral health counseling, foster care and adoption services, youth intervention programs, residential care, community support services, and family-focused programs, CYFS empowers individuals and families to achieve their full potential and build brighter futures.

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