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Suicide can't be taboo; we have to talk this through together

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Editor's Note: This article involves talk of suicide, self-mutilation and depression. If you or someone you know is struggling with suicidal thoughts, contact the 9-8-8 National Suicide & Crisis Lifeline.

There's never a good way to talk about suicide and death. It's never an easy conversation to have.

Over the course of the last two weeks, Tallapoosa Publishers has had a pair of suicides and another death of a student. It's not easy for me as an editor, and it certainly hasn't been easy for our reporters who are on the ground.

Suicides are one of the hardest questions a news editor faces. How delicate should you be when reporting on them? How do you report the cause of death? Should you? Is it a personal matter, or was it a public figure? Was it in a public place? These are all questions we have had to deeply consider the past two weeks.

Another thing we were forced to consider, and obviously wanted to avoid, is the possibility of suicide contagion. According to an article by Boston Children's Hospital, suicide contagion doesn't just affect the friends and family of the person who died.

"After suicide, the person's closest friends aren't necessarily the ones at greatest risk," said Kimberly O'Brien, clinical social worker in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at Boston Children's Hospital, in the article. "The kids at greatest risk are the ones who are already emotionally vulnerable and those who believe their classmate solved their problems through suicide."

Either way, suicide is something that needs to be talked about. Whether it be the newspaper diving into services offered and mental healthcare in the area or a conversation between a parent and child, suicide prevention is something that should be at the forefront.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, suicide is the No. 3 cause of death for people ages 15 through 19. It's something that cannot be ignored.

But how do you talk about suicide? I'm not a parent, so I haven't had to face that challenge yet. However, I have had to deal with suicide head on, and the only thing I know to do is tell you my story.

If you've read my columns before, you've heard me say a million times, "High school is the worst place on earth." I'm not even sure the popular kids would tell you 10 years later they enjoyed high school.

When I was in high school, I became very depressed. Between constant bullying, whacked out hormones, feeling weird in my own body and so much more, high school was just a really bad time for me. I considered suicide on multiple occasions and became a regular self-mutilator.

I used to be ashamed of these things about me. I used to feel like I was alone and couldn't talk about them to anyone. It was "taboo." But now, more than 15 years removed from high school, I say to heck with what's taboo and what isn't.

These are serious issues that could be facing you, your child, your best friend, your nephew — anyone in your life. The idea that some people don't "show the warning signs" seems like a bit of a cop-out. Everyone should know at this point that everyone in high school struggles.

I can't tell you the solution to suicidal thoughts; I won't pretend I know that much. But I do know when I got onto the other side, I quickly learned how lucky I was I never went through with. I really wish these kids had a crystal ball because things do get better.

These suicides have weighed heavy on my heart all week, and I've been racking my brain for "the right thing to say."

What I've come to realize in the last day or so is there probably is no right thing to say. But the fact that we're talking about it, that's what matters most. We have to keep the conversations open; we have to keep checking on our friends and loved ones. Don't be afraid to reach out to someone you

think might need help, and don't be afraid to ask for help if you do need it.

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