



Your Story MATTERS

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Columnist

Facing the tough questions of suicide

Have you ever felt so overwhelmed, sad, or hopeless that you considered ending your life?

This is a question I ask to almost every new client that comes in my doors.

You might be surprised who says, “yes.”

Prominent community members, business owners, CEOs, healthcare providers, educators, honor-roll students, dedicated parents, spiritual leaders, elementary-aged children, elite athletes, yoga masters, and politicians are all among the many individuals who were brave enough to tell me that yes, they have contemplated suicide.

The reasons are varied. Wanting to escape, not seeing a way out, exhaustion, burn out, unbearable physical or emotional pain, hopelessness, perceived failure, powerlessness, releasing others from a perceived burden, feeling worthless, or to escape ridicule or bullying are just some possibilities.

We live in a society where we often see one aspect of a person. You might call it a mask, a façade, or social expectations, but behind closed doors that person may be facing an entirely different reality than what might be perceived.

We also live in a society that would come running if I were to break my arm and sign my cast, but if I were to disclose depression or suicidal thoughts, people might judge or run the other way. For many of us talking

about our emotions and feelings may feel uncomfortable or even foreign. Some of us may have been taught to suppress emotions, keep our heads down, work hard, and don't be a problem. Sound familiar? Strangely and perhaps sadly, this mindset is reminiscent to our society's version of success.

But, as I like to ask my stoic, hard-working clients, how's that working for you?

Furthermore, with suicide rates and depression rates on the rise, how's that working for us — as a society, community, family?

We have all experienced our share of emotional pain and struggle. Many of us have a personal story about suicide whether it is regarding ourselves or somebody else. Suicide can have profound impacts on communities. In the small towns of Silverton and Sisters where I practice, the impact of tragedy can feel more intense, palpable, and immediate. The shroud of grief can be heavy. Attempting to sweep such things under the rug, most of the time only perpetuates a sense of isolation and shame.

The misguided notion that suicide is somehow selfish or the easy way out does us no favors and compounds shame and silence. Most often it is rather the point that in desperation, people are overcome by the long, hard struggle of staying alive — many have fought hard time after time and may ultimately feel defeated. They did not simply give up.

Not everyone who contemplates or completes suicide has a mental illness per se. While mental illness can contribute, rejection, financial woes, impending crises, loss, and/or relationship problems can all be driving factors as well.

Like many small towns, Sisters and Silverton are charming and somewhat idyllic communities, but certainly both have their emotional layers and undercurrents. People are struggling, and too often they are among those you least suspect. We all compartmentalize at times

— especially in our go-go-go society, which often gives us little time to grieve, process, and feel. A community's social decorum, culture, and pressures can sometimes leave little room for authenticity and acceptance.

Suicide rates are up 30 percent across the nation since 1999. Suicide is the leading cause of death among Oregonians age 10-24. So, we must start asking tough questions, having tough conversations, and allowing space for personal stories to be shared. Talking about suicide and our emotional well-being needs to take place beyond the walls of a counseling office. It is a topic that ought to be talked about in our places of worship, clubs, schools, workplaces, and within the walls of our home. Let's come together, support one another, strategize, and work toward prevention.

“The power of community to create health is far greater than any physician, clinic, or hospital.”

— Mark Hyman

Editor's note: Starting January 2019, She Soars Psychiatry, LLC will be hosting community forums in Sisters and Silverton on suicide as part of a greater “Shame-Less” series aimed at debunking stigma and shame on a number of topics impacting emotional wellness. Anybody who has an interest in showing support, has a story to share, or wants to contribute to ideas of how Sisters can become stronger as a community is welcome. More details about dates/times/location TBA.

Owner of She Soars Psychiatry, Audry Van Houweling, also welcomes those with stories or ideas to email shesoarspsych@gmail.com.

FOOTBALL: Outlaws showed grit and determination

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basis, his teammates gave him top votes in the Dedication to Improvement award.

Fendall said, “The Dedication to Improvement award goes to the player that shows growth from year to year and week to week, not necessarily the ‘Most Improved,’ because they may have been performing at a high level already. It goes to the guy who shows commitment to physical and mental improvement through his action.”

Kersavage (junior) was an honorable-mention all-league defensive back. He recorded three interceptions, and was second on the team in catches.

Fendall said, “Garrett might have the highest football IQ on our team. He can play a number of positions, and is dedicated to the mental mastery of the game. You can count on him as a coach on the field. He used this intelligence to intercept passes, a testament to his ability to understand the scheme, and study the opponent's tendencies to aid his anticipatory skills. He's an excellent all-around athlete, and is near

and dear to coaches hearts with his love of the game.”

Martin (junior) was an honorable-mention defensive line pick. Fendall stated that Ethan is another player who would have garnered more votes if the Outlaws had finished higher in the league standings.

“Ethan is one of our most athletic guys, and plays tough every week,” said Fendall. “He's always been a big kid, so sometimes it goes unnoticed that he's blocking guys with 40-to-60 pound advantages. He plays with excellent speed, which makes him very difficult to block on the defensive line. He is a guy quarterbacks have to be aware of every time they drop back.”

Sharp (sophomore) rounds out the all-league picks. Hayden earned honorable mention as a punter, a position Fendall said many people don't notice or value.

“Hayden saved our bacon time and time again by changing the field position in games, and helping us dig out of holes,” said Fendall. “What really was noticed was not only his ability to punt, but the athletic ability to field any snap, and get the ball quickly, which made a huge impact in games. He's a tremendous athlete. He's good athletically, but probably also one of our toughest kids in the program.”

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