SIUSLAW NEWS | SATURDAY, AUGUST 31, 2019 | 9A

"When people get to a point

of acting on suicidal thoughts,

they have blinders on. The in-

dividual doesn't see that their

behavior will be hurting any-

one else, In fact, if you talk

with a suicidal person, they

oftentimes tell you 'My family

will be better off without me.'

They're thinking at that point

is so distorted that they see

suicide as their only way out

of whatever is overwhelming

them; whether it is depression,

Severance said, in gener-

al, the main thing to look for

when someone might be suffering from suicidal thoughts

is a change in behavior. So,

whether they're usually out-

going and suddenly they're

very withdrawn, or if they're

normally very quiet and now

they are very loud and bois-

terous. Sometimes people will

be angrier or more verbal than

Ultimately, there is no par-

ticular behavior to look for;

rather, family members should

watch for any drastic change

in behavior, according to Sev-

"You just want to be open to

talking with them, just letting

them know you're noticing

some changes. You're worried

about them, you love them,

give them every opportunity

to talk," Severance said. "You

have to keep letting them

know you're there. Keep trying

to talk with them, because they

may not be able to talk the first

15 times that you approach

them — but the 16th time, that

window might be open for the

kind of communication neces-

The main thing to empha-

size to someone suffering is

that they are not alone. Sever-

ance said to, "Let them know

you are there for them, they

are loved, and you will be there

for them through their pain."

sary to get them some help."

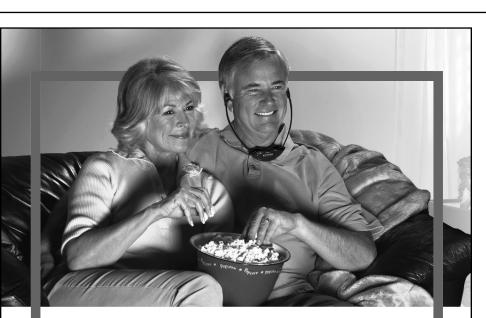
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erance.

financial issues, custody bat-

tles or whatever."

feeling.



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Severance said with Florence's high suicide rate, she saw a need for this in western Lane County.

"As long as there is a need, we'll be here," she said. Severance is also a licensed

clinical social worker. "People have talked about how incredibly helpful it is for them to connect with other families who have suffered this type of loss. ... This is a very different type of loss," she said, adding that group members have talked about the incredibly positive result they're getting from just having that connection with other families who have also lost a loved one to suicide.

"It's wonderful to see how warmly these families embrace each other," said Severance

Stigmas plague the topic of suicide from those suffering to individuals who have lost a loved one to suicide. Severance said this is something they spend time talking about in the group.

"We talk a lot about that stigma, the shame, the blame that comes along with having lost someone to suicide in your family. There's a real feeling of isolation because for most people, it's a very taboo subject," Severance said. "People don't know how to approach the subject, so the family survivors find people sometimes avoiding them. So, we talk a lot about that in group and try to find ways to address these and other issues."

Severance said they also discuss other aspects of suicide in the group, such as the reasons why family and friends might not have known their loved one was suffering.

"Clues we have in hindsight are usually only available to us after the fact," she said. "And yet people blame themselves for not being able to predict their loved one's behavior. Some people choose to suffer in silence. They don't allow anyone to know they are in



tremendous pain. We cannot offering to go with the person always know what another is to seek help, to start them on a path to healing.

"We need to open up the conversation and not have it be so taboo. Let those who are in pain know that you are willing to listen and validate that their feelings are real," said Severance, who added that fighting the stigma around depression, suicide and mental health in general is the first step.

"In my counseling work, I would often hear people say, 'I'm not depressed. I don't need meds. I don't need counseling.' I would say to them 'If you have diabetes, would you say no to insulin?' Your head and your body — it's all one," Severance said. "Why is illness above the neck considered taboo but below the neck is acceptable? We really need to be more open to the fact that mental health issues are no different than physical health issues and need to be treated and addressed just the same. There is no difference."

For more information on the Suicide Survivor Support group in Florence, contact Severance at 916-802-9705 or visit the Monday meetings.

"Anyone who has lost someone to suicide is more than welcome to attend group," said Severance. "The families here are very warm and welcoming."

Lane County offers multiple and you're there to talk. And resources for those suffering from depression and suicidal thoughts, as well as resources for those who have lost a loved one to suicide.

> Hourglass Community Crisis Center is a 24-hour crisis drop-in center serving adults in Lane County. If an adult is experiencing a mental health crisis, they can receive immediate care and services. Located at 71 Centennial Loop, Suite A, Eugene, OR.

> The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) also offers many support groups for those suffering from suicidal thoughts and a family support group for those who have lost someone to suicide. These take place in Eugene at 2411 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.

> National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is 1-800-273-8255. It can also be accessed by visiting suicidepreventionlifeline. org. The lifeline for Spanish speakers, Nacional de Prevención del Suicidio, is 1-888-628-9454. The lifeline for deaf and hard of hearing people is 1-800-799-4889.



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