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## PREVENTION from page 9A

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 always know what another is feeling.

"When people get to a point of acting on suicidal thoughts, they have blinders on. The individual doesn't see that their behavior will be hurting anyone 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, financial issues, custody battles or whatever."

Severance said, in general, the main thing to look for when someone might be suffering from suicidal thoughts is a change in behavior. So, whether they're usually outgoing and suddenly they're very withdrawn, or if they're normally very quiet and now they are very loud and boisterous. Sometimes people will be angrier or more verbal than usual.

Ultimately, there is no particular behavior to look for; rather, family members should watch for any drastic change in behavior, according to Severance.

"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, and you're there to talk. And 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 necessary to get them some help."

The main thing to emphasize to someone suffering is that they are not alone. Severance said to, "Let them know you are there for them, they are loved, and you will be there for them through their pain."

Severance also recommends

offering to go with the person 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 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](http://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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