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From tragedy comes hope

On Sunday, runners and walkers of all ages turned out for the third annual Connor’s Climb 5K. The event, appropriately held at Exeter High School, took place four years after Blue Hawk Connor Ball, 14, tragically took his own life.

Having covered Connor's passing back in 2011, gotten to know his mother Tara Holmes Ball, and interviewed members of the Exeter High School community each year since the climb was started, we continue to be struck by the sense of community that springs from the tragedy, particularly among our young people.

Connor’s Climb has helped to raise awareness. It has promoted an open discussion of suicide — its causes and above all its prevention.

Four years have not dulled Ball's pain or eroded Connor's memory among his classmates. Today, however, Tara Holmes Ball speaks gracefully and eloquently about her loss and has turned it into a force for good. The smiles and enthusiasm on display of every runner and volunteer at this annual event leave little doubt that, as Paralympic champion Victoria Arlen said, the community has turned "test into testimony, a mess into a message."

To that same end, September has been designated as Suicide Prevention Month, and in reviewing the mountains of material offered by groups such as American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, one thing is clear — help is available.

Preventing suicide, however, is not an easy task. It requires awareness and a willingness to step forward to help.

According to the foundation, those who kill themselves usually exhibit warning signs, either through what they say or what they do — the more warning signs, the greater the risk.

They may talk directly about killing themselves or express feelings of having no reason to live, being a burden to others, or feeling trapped or experiencing unbearable pain.

There is behavior. A person’s suicide risk is greater if a behavior is new or has increased, especially if it’s related to a painful event, loss, or change.

This includes increased use of alcohol or drugs; looking for a way to kill themselves, such as searching online for materials or means; acting recklessly; withdrawing from activities; isolating from family and friends; sleeping too much or too little; visiting or calling people to say goodbye; giving away prized possessions; and/or showing aggression.

Signs that someone may commit suicide can be found in mood swings. Those who are considering suicide often display one or more of the following moods: depression, loss of interest, rage, irritability, humiliation, and/or anxiety.

So what do you do if you witness any of these?

“You can make a difference, especially if you can get somebody to talk about it,” says Elsa Ronningstam, a board member of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. “Many completed suicides, people don’t talk about it — they just go and do it.”

"Anyone who takes the time to listen — calmly, sympathetically — can save a life," said Dr. Christine Moutier, the foundation’s chief medical officer.

“A suicidal crisis — the actual moment, that period of possibility — is on the order of five minutes to 30 minutes,” Moutier said. “If you engage them in conversation, there’s a very good chance you’re getting them through that period.”

There is also the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at (800) 273-8255 as well as the following websites:

www.yspp.org/index.htm

www.dhhs.nh.gov/dphs/suicide/documents/annual-report-2013.pdf

www.connorsclimb.org

www.keepsoundminds.org

"The above are all wonderful resources for accurate data on suicide in New Hampshire," says Dr. Kristen Johnson of Core Physicians, an affiliate of Exeter Hospital. "The first is a wonderful resource for youth suicide prevention and education. The second is the DHHS report from 2013 on suicide. The third and fourth are two wonderful nonprofits run by families who have been seriously impacted by mental illness and suicide."

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