

MANHATTAN VOICE

Hope, help available for those struggling with depression

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By Chandra Wilson

National Suicide Prevention Week begins Sept. 5 and sadly, suicide has climbed into the Top 10 leading causes of death in the United States in recent years. The CDC reports the number of Americans struggling with depression has increased over the past 18 months, which included COVID pandemic, lockdown-related layoffs, social injustice and fears of an uncertain future.

There is hope, however, and Deirdre DeLeo, Associate Director with Community Mental Health Services at the Visiting Nurse Service of New York is encouraging those in need to reach out.

“We’re still in the midst of a public health crisis and suicide is another public health crisis,” DeLeo said. “We really do need to be looking out for each other and we need to have a brave moment where we either say that we need help or say to somebody else ‘I’m worried about you. How can I help?’”

DeLeo said the anxiety and stress of living through the pandemic is understandable, but it is important to remember that this shared experience can also help us build stronger bonds amongst each other.

“We are all experiencing the same stress and we’re all in this together,” she said.

There are both verbal and non-verbal warning signs to look out for: Making statements like “People are better off without me.”

Hopelessness and statements like “Things are never going to get better.”

Tendency to withdraw – especially if they had been outgoing previously.

Giving away possessions they once held dear.

Change in sleeping or eating habits.

High-risk or reckless behavior.

The three most important steps one should follow if they fear someone they know is considering suicide are: Ask, Listen and Get Help.

“If you’re talking with a loved one either in person or on the phone and you have any questions that they may be thinking of killing themselves, you should ask them in whatever way you feel most comfortable,” DeLeo said. “Then you need to listen. It’s very difficult and it’s scary to ask that question and hear that person say ‘Yes, I’m having those thoughts,’ but let that person talk. That’s their experience. Don’t try to tell them it’s going to get better, don’t try to minimize it for them. Just simply listen. They’re taking a big risk and they’re probably very relieved someone’s asking them, since they’ve been living with these thoughts.”

The last step is to get them help and that could be a three-way call with NYC WELL, a 24/7 hotline. DeLeo recommends remaining on the phone with your loved one as they make that call because while they may be willing to open up to someone they know and trust, it will not be as easy for them when speaking to a counselor they’ve never met.

VNSNY’s mobile crisis teams work to connect those who are struggling with resources. They are dispatched through NYC Well and available by calling 1-888-692-9355.

For more information visit www.vnsny.org.