

FACING SUICIDE



Toolkit Article #5: Reasons to Hope

REASONS TO HOPE

Suicide prevention experts agree that a critical factor in understanding and preventing suicide is hope. Across the United States, communities are learning about suicide prevention and taking steps to help friends and loved ones in crisis. Learn the stories of Greg Whitesell, Fonda Bryant, and Dave Boettger, who share their lived experiences to bring hope and healing to others.

If you are considering suicide or if you or someone you know is in emotional crisis, call or text 988 for confidential, free, crisis support.

Greg Whitesell was a high school basketball star on the Flathead Indian Reservation in Montana when he considered taking his own life. Fortunately, two concerned friends acted immediately to intervene for Greg, and family members made sure he got therapy and ongoing treatment.

“My two friends were right there, you know?” says Greg. “And it's crazy to think about it because I know I wouldn't be here if they didn't come through, and if they didn't knock on my door.”

Today, Greg and his teammates from the Arlee Warriors champion basketball team use social media videos to spread hope to others – videos that have gone viral and contributed to a “contagion of hope” in Arlee and the surrounding communities.

“The way that you start a contagion of hope is to start spreading stories of recovery, spreading stories of resilience, spreading stories of hope,” says Madelyn Gould, Professor of Epidemiology in Psychiatry at Columbia University. “Because people don't think that you can recover from many different types of mental illnesses, and you can! There are people who've been seriously suicidal who then go on to have remarkably wonderful lives.”

Fonda Bryant offers another story of hope as a survivor of suicide. She now teaches community members in Charlotte, NC how to recognize and respond to signs of suicide risk as a suicide reduction activist. Fonda is motivated by the belief that suicide can be prevented and she works hard to help others find hope and healing in their communities.

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“What gives me hope about suicide?” Fonda asks. “For me, I guess it's because there are people out here that care, there's organizations that care. But what gives me the most hope is being able to educate people and not just with words, but [showing them they can] make personal action.”

And experts agree that all of us have a role to play in preventing suicide.

“There are investments that we can make as a nation,” says Dr. Christine Moutier, Chief Medical Officer for the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. “Investments in research, in clinical treatments, in programs, prevention education – both in the clinical setting, but it can also be for families, students, teachers, law enforcement, policy makers. As it turns out, everyone has a role to play in preventing suicide. We can become a safety net as a community, and not just rely on the clinical system to provide care.”

To learn more about risk factors, how to respond, and why means matter, watch the other videos in our series.

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