

Live Well Be Well

Title:

Let's Talk Suicide Prevention

Introduction

Welcome to Live Well, Be Well! A podcast where we speak candidly about all things health and well-being! My name is Renee Dell'Acqua and I'm a Health Educator in Health Promotion Services here at UC San Diego. And today I have a special guest on the show, Dr. Tiffany O'Meara, psychologist at UCSD's Counseling & Psychological Services.

On this episode of Live Well Be Well, we'll be shedding light on an important topic that is often left undiscussed but brings about devastating outcomes and that is suicide. We want this episode to bring hope to those who may be going through difficult times in their lives as well as those wanting to support others.

So we hope you get inspired, we hope you feel connected, and we hope you discover new ways to live your best life. Let's get started!

R: First off, thank you so much Dr. O'Meara for coming on the show today to talk about this extremely important topic of suicide and suicide prevention.

T: Thank you so much Renee. It's a pleasure to be back here again. And thank you for bringing up this topic of suicide and suicide prevention- I think it's so important to talk about. Before we start talking, one thing I'd like to say is that talking about this topic and listening to this podcast today may bring up an emotional reaction- and that's really natural. So I would like to encourage folx to seek support if you find yourself having a strong reaction- whether getting support from a friend or family member, a mentor, or scheduling an appointment at CAPS.

R: Thank you, Dr. O'Meara for bringing up that important note.

So with that, I'd like to start our conversation about the risk factors for suicide. Often times we hear from others and the media that there was this one thing that caused someone to die by suicide. However, suicide is such a complex issue that involves so many different factors. Can you speak to those factors that may increase a person's risk for suicide? (KNOW THE RISK FACTORS)

T: Sure. First, it's true what you said about suicide being a complex issue. So I'll share some risk factors- and what I mean by risk factor is that these things may increase the

Live Well Be Well

possibility of suicide, but they might not be the direct cause of suicide. One of the biggest risk factors is if the person has made previous suicide attempts. The best predictor of future behavior is past behavior, so if a person has made an attempt before, then they may be at higher risk of making another attempt. Another risk factor are mental health conditions, such as depression, anxiety, PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder), which could include past history of trauma or abuse, and especially when these mental health conditions are not treated. Also, substance abuse, serious physical health conditions, or social isolation may be other risk factors. If someone is struggling with serious or prolonged problems- for example, a major loss- a job loss or loss of a loved one, relationship problems, a financial crisis, and they have a stigma against seeking help or going to counseling, that could be a risk factor. And if they have access to firearms, drugs, or medications, that may also increase risk. Again, these things alone don't cause suicide, but just may increase risk for suicide. I think it's also important to say that many people experience mental health conditions and when they get treatment and learn to manage their symptoms, that they can live very engaged lives.

R: Thank you so much for discussing the risk factors for suicide. And as you were discussing these different factors, it really drove home the fact that suicide is complex. So with that, what if a student is experiencing these various factors and they're understandably having a difficult time, what support is out there for them? (PERSONAL SUPPORT)

T: I think that one of the most helpful things is to *reach out* for support. Connect to friends, family, community. On campus, we have a lot of places for support. CAPS provides individual and group counseling, and also medication treatment for students experiencing mental health conditions. We see students for a variety of reasons- for example, anxiety, stress, depression, substance abuse, grief and loss, relationship problems. For those who may be struggling socially, we have therapy groups for social anxiety, process groups to help increase insight in interpersonal relationships, and Community Forums to help students connect with others and build support. CAPS also offers Daily Drop-In Workshops in which we teach skills to help cope with emotions and manage symptoms such as anxiety and depression. There is no wait for our Community Forums and Daily Drop-In Workshops. And all CAPS services are free for registered UCSD students. Health Promotions Services has the Collegiate Recovery Program that provides support for students seeking recovery from addiction. And The Hub Basic Needs Center on campus helps students with accessing nutritious food, stable housing, and financial resources. I would also like to mention that CAPS offers crisis services 24/7- you can call 858-534-3755 (press 2 if it's after hours), and there is always a counselor available to talk. Of course, if you are in imminent danger, you should call 911 or go to the nearest hospital.

Live Well Be Well

R: Say you yourself aren't experiencing those risk factors but someone you know someone who is. Say a friend, a roommate, a partner, a family member, etc. What are the warning signs of someone who may be contemplating suicide? (KNOW THE WARNING SIGNS)

T: One thing to look out for is a change in behavior- do they not seem like their usual self. Perhaps they are withdrawing from friends or activities, seem very agitated or irritable, they seem very sad, sleeping a lot or having a lot of difficulty sleeping, no appetite, are anxious/worrying- or getting panicky. It can be common for many of us to have these symptoms every once in a while. One single isolated symptom is not something to worry about. But if you notice many symptoms, or if something is carrying on for a long period of time, that may be a sign you want to check in with them. Also if their alcohol or drug use is increasing, or their behavior seems strange or erratic/disruptive, or if they seem to lose contact with reality- these are concerning symptoms.

Listen to what they say- if they are talking about things feeling hopeless, feeling that nothing is going to be able to help them solve their problems, having no reason to live, feeling like they are a burden to others, feel that they are in unbearable pain or if they talk about or write about death, dying, or killing themselves.

And also look out for their behaviors, they may start giving away their possessions, start to make plans for after they are gone- for example, maybe shutting down a website they run or their social media, they may send texts or emails in which they are saying goodbye, they may be searching online for how to kill themselves, getting the means to kill themselves, such as buying a gun or stocking up on pills. These are all things to take very seriously.

R: What advice would you give to someone who is concerned about their friend, family member, or peer who are displaying and/or saying these warning signs? How should they navigate that difficult conversation? (HAVE THE CONVERSATION)

T: First, I just want to say that it is very scary when you are concerned for a loved one and you think they might be thinking of killing themselves. Know that you are not alone in this. You can also reach out for help- talk with a trusted friend or family member to get support. And CAPS is also available to consult with you if you are concerned about a friend or family member. You can call our crisis services and speak to someone the same day to discuss your concerns and what you might say or do. Sometimes people are worried about talking about suicide. They worry that if they ask about it, that it might put that idea in their head. Or they worry that their friend is going to be mad at them or be offended. So we might shy away from asking them. But research shows that this is not true- We know that checking in with friends is helpful. I want to encourage you that talking about it will not cause someone to kill themselves. If you ask about thoughts of suicide and they aren't having them, most people will just clarify that they

Live Well Be Well

aren't having those thoughts. But if they are having those thoughts, asking them shows that you are someone who is not afraid to talk about it, that you care, and it can open up a helpful conversation.

First, I would ask if I could talk with them and be sure that we could talk in a place that has privacy. It can help to start with what we call "I messages" - start by pointing out what specific behaviors are concerning, and express how you feel: "I've noticed that you've been sleeping more, you didn't attend classes last week, and you haven't been returning my texts. I'm concerned about you." And then ask them direct open-ended questions like, "Tell me about how you're doing. How are you coping with what's been going on in your life?" If they talk to you about how difficult things have been, I will sometimes use a strategy in which I will say, "Sometimes when people are going through difficult times, they can feel hopeless or feel like giving up. I wonder if you ever feel this way?" And "sometimes when people feel hopeless, or feel that they are a burden, they have thoughts of hurting or killing themselves? Have you been having thoughts of hurting or killing yourself?" And it's okay to just ask directly, "Are you thinking of hurting yourself?" "Are you thinking of killing yourself?" "Have you ever thought about suicide before or tried to hurt yourself before?"

If they aren't in any immediate danger, you can talk with them about the importance of support- from family and friends, but also from other support resources. Introduce the idea of building their "support team." This can include trying the Universities resources, such as CAPS. It can help for you to normalize reaching out for support and encourage them that asking for help is a strength. If you feel comfortable, sharing about a time that you reached out for help, can help to reduce stigma.

You can also offer to be there with them as they call for an appointment, or even walk them over to CAPS to schedule an appointment. I would also suggest providing them with crisis resources, such as the CAPS crisis line, and if they are in imminent danger, don't hesitate to call 911. Also, please remember that the University has a lot of places for support, including the Campus Community Centers, the Center for Ethics and Spirituality, Res Life Staff, the College Dean of Student Affairs, - these are just examples of many helpful resources on campus. And if a student goes to one resource, we are all really good about helping to refer the student to additional places of support based on their needs.

R: Thank you so much for providing insight and knowledge about suicide. I do believe that knowledge and education is a critical step in prevention. If you would like to get more involved in suicide prevention here at UCSD, now is the chance! We are hosting a suicide prevention walk in collaboration with the American Foundation of Suicide Prevention called Out of the Darkness.

This event will be taking place Saturday, May 1st at 9AM. This walk will take place in-person (in groups of 10 while practicing our COVID-19 safety measures of masking,

Live Well Be Well

physically distancing, and proper hand hygiene). If you are not on campus or in the area, you can still participate by taking a walk around your neighborhood in solidarity! Register now by searching UCSD Out of the Darkness or

And the last question I have for you revolves around May's Mental Health Awareness Month. [What can students look forward to this upcoming month that will honor and support their mental health? \(OVERVIEW OF MHAM 2021\)](#)

T: If you go to caps.ucsd.edu/may, you will find a large number of events from departments all across campus (HPS, CAPS, Recreation, iLead, FSAP are just a few)- all offering programming for student mental health and well-being. There are programs for the entire UCSD community- undergrad students, graduate and professional students, and staff and faculty. There's really something for everyone- so I highly encourage you to check out the offerings throughout the month of May. And if you feel a little nervous about attending alone- we are encouraging students "Bring a Buddy, Make a Buddy"- so if you have a friend you'd like to bring- please do. And if you come alone- then you will have the opportunity to meet someone new. And the great news is that many of these programs go on throughout the entire school year, we are just highlighting them for May.

R: Again, if you or someone you know is in need of support, know that you are not alone. Contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255) for free 24/7 confidential support for people in distress, prevention and crisis resources for you or your loved ones. You can also text the Crisis Text Line by texting 'HOME' to 741741.

And of course, Counseling and Psychological Services here on campus is here to support you. If you are experiencing a crisis in which you are concerned about yourself or a fellow Triton, contact: 858-534-3755. If it is after 4PM, or on the weekends or holidays, you can call that same number 858-534-3755 and select option 2.

Renee, other helpful websites that you may want to post

- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention: <https://afsp.org/>
- Suicide Prevention Resource Center <http://www.sprc.org/>
- Jed Foundation: <https://www.jedfoundation.org/>

Closing

So that concludes this episode of Live Well Be Well! If you like what you heard and would like to learn more about topics related to health and well-being, there's much more to come! Be sure to check out our website healthpromotion.ucsd.edu and follow

Live Well Be Well

us on Instagram and Facebook under @UCSDHPS. Also, be sure to check our CAPS' website caps.ucsd.edu and Instagram @ucsdtritonsflourish ... Stay tuned for our next episode of Live Well, Be Well.

Until next time, be kind, be true, be you. And remember, to be well is to live well.