

SUICIDE PREVENTION AWARENESS MONTH SPOTLIGHT

Why? What Could I Have Done? How Did This Happen?

By Gail Rodgers

These questions have plagued me, over and over, when I have lost those close to me to suicide. No matter how many times I ask myself, I come up with no meaningful answers.

I was asked to write an article for Suicide Prevention Awareness Month and jumped at the chance. Suicide is deeply personal to me. There have been times in my life when I have been depressed, or felt like life was just way too much, but I have never actually felt suicidal.

Unfortunately, several people very close to me have been suicidal, and some of them have been successful.

Suicide is a difficult topic to talk about. It is scary, depressing and highly personal. All of us can think of some well-known person or celebrity who seemed to have a magical life, who ended their lives.

Years ago, a friend who I will call H, had a good job in New York City. She had more than her share of problems and mental health challenges but she had a great family support system. She had friends who cared about her and checked in on her regularly.

After seemingly feeling better, smiling and saying life was improving, she attempted suicide. I was naïve and completely shocked at the depth of her pain. Fortunately, she was unsuccessful, but her mental illness persisted and she made multiple further attempts at suicide.

Once she was living in another state and a group of friends suspected something was wrong because she suddenly went very quiet. After much angst, I called the local police to check on her. Her family was with her and she was super pissed at me.

A year later, a similar situation occurred of her being very upset and suddenly going quiet. I agonized for what seemed like ages. Finally called the police again. They broke into her house and barely saved her life.

Each of these instances is emblazoned in my brain. Because even if I cannot understand the depth of someone's pain, stress or mental challenges, sadly I have learned to ask

questions. Uncomfortable questions.

Ask questions, call in resources, whether they be other family members or friends, mental health professionals, or even the police for a wellness check.

Earlier this year, a friend I will call B notified another friend that he wanted to end it all. A chain reaction of friends and family intervened and marshalled resources for support. One friend said, how on earth can he feel that way? He is so successful, smart, good looking, funny and on and on.

Fortunately, B responded positively to the interventions, began medication, mental health counseling and is back to his amazing, and mentally healthy self.

Physical illnesses like diabetes and cancer can frequently be found on routine screening tests. Depression and suicidality are not always as easy to identify, I believe in large part because they are stigmatized and rarely discussed.

I am no mental health professional, but from my perspective, here are some strategies to combat suicide.

1. Educate yourself - [https://www.nami.org/Get-Involved/Awareness-Events/Suicide-Prevention-Awareness-Month-\(SPAM\)](https://www.nami.org/Get-Involved/Awareness-Events/Suicide-Prevention-Awareness-Month-(SPAM)) NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) is an excellent resource.
2. Decrease stigma – let those around you that you are interested in their whole self, not just a more obvious physical illness.
3. Ask questions – how are you? Are you ok? Is there anything I can do to help you? Then LISTEN.
4. Engage resources – are there other friends or family members and mental health professionals who can assist.
5. Get help - If you or someone you know is struggling or in crisis, help is available. Call or text 988 or chat [988lifeline.org](https://www.988lifeline.org) to reach the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline.

Anyone reading this article knows that the incidence of mental health challenges are disproportionately higher in lawyers than in the majority of the population. We need to face this with openness, education about how to prevent suicide and by destigmatizing mental illness.

I by no means have the answers. But I know personally and painfully that we need engage and talk about suicide.

I never want to ask: Why? What could I have done? How could this happen? Ever again.

This article is dedicated to the memory of my dear friend, SS, who took her life on March 9, 2022.



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