

Let's start talking about mental illness and suicide

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Many factors contribute to teen death rate

Depression isn't a sign of weakness in a human. It can strike anyone of any age, race, or sex.

Depression affects how the person acts to the way they think, contributing to problems with their relationships which can lead to the abuse of alcohol and drugs and ultimately- suicide.

Depression may lead to thoughts of suicide, and nationally suicide is the second leading cause of death from ages 15 to 24.

But according to Andrew Romanoff, president, and CEO of Mental Health Colorado, suicide has taken first place in Colorado as the leading cause of adolescent death, and Colorado ranks ninth in the nation for suicide in general.

While the number of suicides increase here in Colorado,

Kimberly Pratt, a postvention Specialist and Educator at the North Range Behavioral Health, said they are growing all over the United States except for in Nevada. Nobody quite knows the reason why Pratt said.

The discussion of suicide among young people is almost taboo; Pratt said people are afraid to discuss a topic where even a kid's thoughts are seen as shameful, and they should feel sorry about their emotions.

An anonymous student at Eaton high school who has felt the effects of depression said, "I was always seen as a happy kid, the one that was always making everyone laugh. So I tried to keep all my negative thoughts and emotions under wraps." Pratt said hiding emotions to seem normal is a common trend for teenagers.

Kids often look to each other for help but they end up creating a toxic situation where

their emotions feed off each other. Kids aren't trained to help other kids with their pain and few adults are too.

Pratt said the same part of our brain that lights up when we have physical pain, such as breaking a bone, is the same pain center of the brain that lights up when we feel depressed or have anxiety.

Our society treats emotional pain differently than it treats physical pain, but our bodies can't tell the difference.

People need to recognize that the emotional part of a person's body needs to heal with time in the same ways society allows broken bones to heal. Silence is what breeds the pain.

Teenagers not talking about the subject of suicide makes them afraid, Pratt said, much like the '90s when our society was afraid to talk about sex ed.

Today experts say talking about sex ed has decreased STDs

and teen pregnancies. Talking about tough issues may be the key to making them less fearful and decrease the negative outcomes.

Many adults have concerns that social media and bullying lead to suicide, but Pratt said, "Bullying does not cause suicide. If it did, we would have a dead kid every single day because people are bullied all the time." However, bullying can lead to depression as can social media and financial situations. There's not one single thing that leads a person to either depression or suicide. Every

person is different, Pratt said. Preventing suicide among young adults can be helped by educating parents and adults.

Pratt said, creating that relationship between a trusted adult and young adult can be the most beneficial for the adolescent. Some Eaton high school teachers have taken this to heart. One of these teachers is Shelly Tregoning. "They feel like they

trust me enough to confide in me without judgment, Tregoning said. However, most teenagers aren't willing to tell an adult

how they are feeling. Teacher Chris Love agreed. "We spend more time with a hand full of students than any other adults in their lives, allowing us to build trust to the point where they are willing to share personal information with us over anyone else at that moment."

Since teachers are the ones talking to kids, not only should they have an awareness for students' mental health but training for it as well. Love said, "There are times I've come across these situations I'm scared out of my mind because I am honestly just using life experiences and anything I've come upon to help that student." The lack of training plays a significant part when talking to any student in that situation.

Statistics show kids are being diagnosed with mental illnesses earlier and more often. Pratt said the teaching of mental health should be introduced in

middle school right about the time of puberty. Young kids are being expected to engage more than ever in school and other activities, so kids 10 and younger should be discussing resilience and help-seeking behaviors to help deal with the stress. Love said he feels that schools need more professional development to help teachers practice the skills needed to help students.

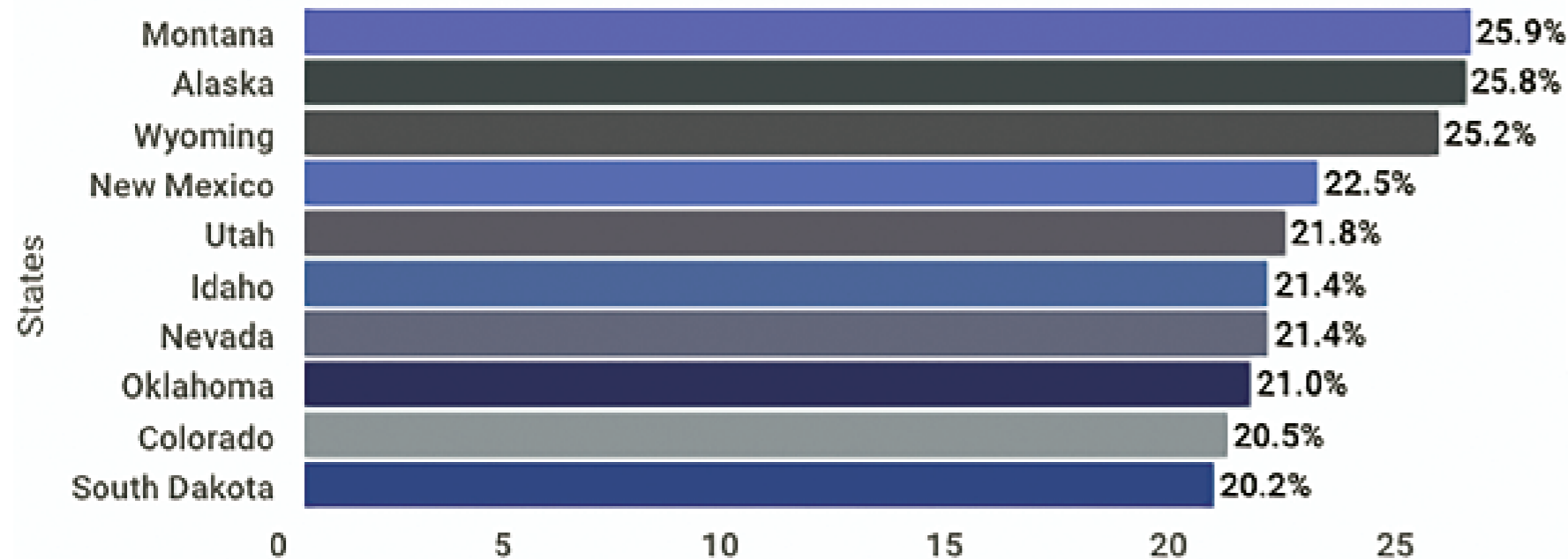
Not enough teachers are willing to answer that call to have that difficult conversation.

Love said, "It's all very real, raw, and authentic. It can be messy and scary but if not me then who? If we never have that conversation with a student having those feelings, they might feel like they are on an island; all people have difficulties."

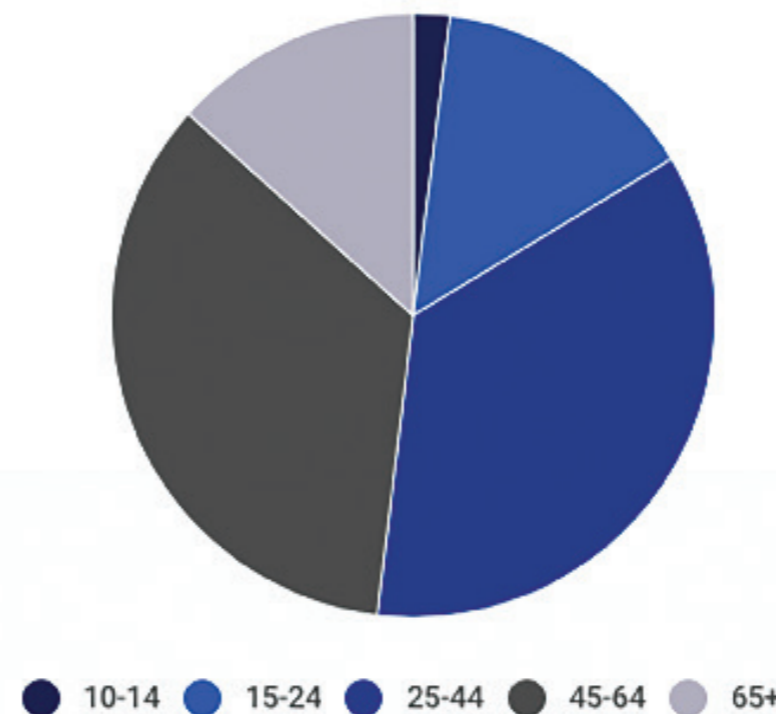
Kids need to know they are not only normal but also not alone. Kids do not have to wait to seek help. For some they are in the void-- smack dab in the

“
If we never have that conversation with a student having those feelings, they might feel like they are on an island.”
-Chris Love

Ten States with the Highest Suicide Rates



2017 Colorado Suicide Numbers



Rates of suicide between the ages 15-25 between 2007-2017

