

- Depression / Suicide

THE RED FLAGS OF SUICIDE

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Kate Spade and Anthony Bourdain seemed to have it all. Their names rang a bell. They were at the peaks of their careers.

And yet, they weren't happy. They took their own lives.

The old adage comes to mind again: Money can't buy you happiness.

"It's never just about money," Dr. Zairah Castelo-Corpus, a psychiatrist at The Medical City Center for Behavioral Health, says.

Depression, she explains, is multifaceted. Successful people may seem to have everything you and I don't. But you never know what's happening in their lives behind closed doors. You never know what triggered their depression — a common cause of suicide, which makes up 20 percent of calls the Health Department's Suicide Hotline have received since its launch last September.

The good news is friends and loved ones can do a lot in preventing suicide. The stigma on suicide still exists, but it's not as strong as it used to be. More people are becoming aware that depression, which may lead to suicide, is treatable. It doesn't last forever.

Corpus reveals the red flags to watch out for:

- Isolation. A person who used to be outgoing suddenly withdraws from friends and loved ones. He locks himself in the room the whole day and refuses invitations to go out with friends and loved ones.
- Changes in appetite. The person rejects food, so he loses weight. The other side of the coin applies as well. The depressed person gorges on food and seeks solace in it.
- Sleep disturbance. The disturbed person can hardly sleep. Or he sleeps almost all the time.
- Reduced ability to experience pleasure. This symptom, called anhedonia, keeps the person from enjoying what he used to find pleasure in. An avid reader doesn't open a book anymore. A sports fan doesn't feel excited about watching his favorite team's basketball match.

Other symptoms of depression are feelings of worthlessness/ inappropriate guilt, fatigue or loss of energy, difficulty in concentrating and recurring thoughts of death.

Corpus adds that the other causes of depression include a family history of suicide and depression and suicide attempts, previous tries at taking one's life, alcohol and substance abuse, financial problems, separation from a spouse or loved one, death or serious sickness in the family, and bullying — physical, verbal or virtual, as in cyberbullying.

There are many things you can do if a friend or loved one has these red flags, or if he tells you he wants to end it all.

Corpus says one precautionary measure to take is making sure all objects that can harm the person are out of arm's reach. Among these are sharp objects like blades and knives,

guns, ropes and pills the person can overdose on.

“Give a listening ear,” she advises. “It’s important to stay calm and nonjudgmental. Let the person unburden himself and cry, if needed. Assure him that you’re just there for him.”

Corpus also points out that a lot of suicidal people feel ambivalent about taking their own life. So you can offer alternatives.

If you’re a friend, you can offer to be the bridge that will connect the depressed person and family members who are in the dark about the problem.

You can also offer to bring the person to a mental health professional, like a psychiatrist, psychologist or counselor.

The Medical City’s Center for Behavioral Health has a staff of mental health professionals assigned to age-specific patients like children, adolescents, adults and seniors.

That’s because some mental health problems, like school bullying, are confined to certain age groups. The psychiatrist can see the patient and the family to discuss the best treatment approach.

The psychiatrist can trace the root of the depression, or find out if the suicidal thoughts are related to other causes like bipolar disorder or anxiety.

Mental health is just as important as physical health. Catching the red flags of suicide early may save a life, and that life could be someone who means the world to you, like a close friend or loved one. That’s why it pays to act now — or pay the price of death — when it’s too late.