

*By Marissa Smith*

### **How We Matter Relates to Suicide Prevention**

The CDC states that the goal of suicide prevention is “to reduce factors that increase risk and to increase factors that promote resilience” (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022). There are four main levels that the CDC breaks suicide risk into: individual, relationship, community, and societal. Some risk factors include the following: mental illness (individual); loss of relationship, social isolation, and bullying (relationship); community violence, trauma, and discrimination (community); unsafe portrayals of suicide in movies and the stigma around suicide/mental health (societal). While you can see there is no single cause of suicide, the most common condition associated with suicide often goes undiagnosed - depression (American Center for Suicide Prevention, 2022).

### **Teen Suicide Rates**

The CDC Data and Statistics Fatal Injury Report for 2020 reports that the suicide rate for teenagers is 14.24% in the United States. While this rate is higher than wanted, it is very low compared to the those of adults which range from 18.35% to 20.86% (American Center for Suicide Prevention, 2020). While many factors could contribute to a lower rate of suicide in teens, I believe that one reason is Generation Z’s advocacy for mental health. “According to the APA, more than a third of Gen Z have said that they have received medical treatment or therapy from a mental health professional” (McKenna, 2023).

### ***How Prevention Relates to “We Matter”***

The study by the CDC shows that the main societal cause of suicide is the stigma that society has put around it. The first step of preventing any problem is to realize there is a problem, and it is no

different with suicide. The concept of “We Matter” not only recognizes that suicide is something that needs to be dealt with but also promotes the idea that every life matters, and therefore, preventative techniques and measures should be taken to stop any life being taken by suicide.

### **What “I Matter, You Matter, We Matter” Means to Me**

I grew up hearing the phrase “I Matter, You Matter, We Matter” every suicide prevention week. I remember when I was in 7th grade and my teacher challenged us to greet as many people as possible in the hall that week, and to be kind to others no matter what. As I got older, it became more than just being kind to others. I saw my own friends struggle with self-harm and thoughts of suicide. Suicide no longer became an abstract concept. I remember always telling my friends how much I loved them when they would struggle. I would remind them that they have a purpose in life unlike anyone else, that this world needs them. This phrase (and the concept all together) helps me remember to be kind to others, realize everyone has a purpose, and to not desert people in their hard times.

### **How I Can Apply “I Matter, You Matter, We Matter” to My Personal Life**

“The words you speak become the house you live in.” - Hafiz. Hafiz was a practicing Muslim and Persian poet during the 1300s (Ursillo, 2020). Even though it was written two thousand years ago, this quote has always stuck out to me. It perfectly describes how I can apply “I Matter, You Matter, We Matter” to my daily life.

### **Having a Positive Self Image**

I have struggled with realizing myself worth my entire life. A couple of years ago, it would have been very difficult for me to say the words “I Matter” about myself. I used to believe that if anything happened that was not supposed to, even if it was out of my control, then it was a result

of me being less than perfect. Of course, it is impossible for anyone to be perfect and therefore an endless cycle of disappointment and disgust towards myself started. It was a long journey, but I'm proud to say that at eighteen years old I have finally realized that the words I say to myself and expectations I have for myself dramatically impact my image. One thing that helped me change my mindset was the quote talked about previously. I realized that I had to talk and think about myself in a positive manner, so that I was surrounded by an environment that was positive. It is hard to build others up when we are already tearing ourselves down. This is why I try to remember to take care of myself so that I can be the best version of me for those that need me, for those that believe that I matter.

### ***How Positive Words Help Other Realize They Matter***

Recent studies have shown that teaching children positive affirmations at home and in school can drastically improve how confident they are in themselves and how they excel in the classroom. "It's best to think of self-affirmations in the literal sense of the word: making the self-firm." - Geoffrey Cohen Stanford University Graduate School of Education (Loos, 2021). I work with preschool-aged children every weekday at my school's aftercare program. I am their teacher from the time they get out of class until their parents come and pick them up. Making the place they spend the end of their day in a positive environment is something that I strive to do. I see how it impacts their moods when I build them up throughout the day and let them know that I hear and see them.

Of course, not everyone I interact with throughout the day is children. However, I believe that positive words have an impact on the way every person's day goes. I can make sure that when I am interacting with my peers at school that I am not only using kind words, but that I am actively including people throughout the day. Some of the risks of suicide discussed early in the essay

(referring to risks in relationships) are feelings of isolation and bullying (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020). I can also make sure that I am being an advocate for mental health and suicide prevention so that those who are suffering do not feel like they must suffer in silence.

### **How Suicide Prevention Can Be Promoted Through “We Matter” in My Community**

The main risk factors of suicide in a community include stress of acculturation, discrimination, and community violence (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention). The main way to prevent these things is making sure every person has a place to understand their culture in their community, and that each culture is celebrated. The main concept of “We Matter” is that every single life has value. This directly translates to celebrating diversity in a community and making sure everyone has a place to express themselves, to understand their background and culture. Someone who is connected to their culture has a greater sense of self identity and belonging, so a feeling of hopelessness and isolation is less likely to be present. With, I think that advocating for every life having value and, as a result, making sure every culture is valued through different outreaches is a way that “We Matter” can promote suicide prevention in my community.

## References

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. (2022, February 17). *Suicide Statistics*. ASFP.

<https://afsp.org/suicide-statistics/>.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2022, November 2). *Risk and Protective Factors*.

CDC. <https://www.cdc.gov/suicide/factors/index.html>.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2022, October 19). *Suicide Prevention*. CDC.

<https://www.cdc.gov/suicide/index.html>.

Loos, K. (2021, June 30). *How Affirmations Can Support Your Child's Learning*. US News.

<https://www.usnews.com/education/k12/articles/affirmations-for-kids-how-parents-can-support-their-childs-learning>.

McKenna, M. (n.d.) *Gen Z: Smashing the Stigma of Mental Health*. British Columbia

Schizophrenia Society. <https://www.bcsc.org/gen-z-smashing-the-stigma-of-mental-health/>.

Ursillo, D. (2020, January 20). *What Did Hafiz Mean When He Wrote "The words you speak*

*become the house you live in?"*. Dave Ursillo. <https://daveursillo.com/what-did-hafiz-mean/>.