

Listening is medicine given to potential suicides

By Mary Kay Roth

Good God, don't jump

A boy sat on a ledge

An old man who had fainted was revived

And everyone agreed it would be a miracle indeed if the boy survived

"Save the life of my child,"

Cried the desperate mother.

—Paul Simon

Not all the "children" or young adults survive.

Suicide was the second leading killer of U.S. college students in 1974, according to the National Institute of Mental Health. Only accidents claimed more students' lives.

State Health statistics show that teenage suicides have tripled in the last ten years. In 1973, 17 suicides by young adults (between the ages of 15 and 24) were reported in Nebraska.

"Few people who have reached the age of 21 have not thought about suicide," said Dr. Carmen Grant, coordinator of Outreach, a UNL counseling service. "Almost everyone has wondered what it would be like if they weren't living."

Yet not everyone attempts suicide.

"I wish I could give you ten easy steps to tell who is a real risk," she said, "but I can't."

Something wrong

If a close friend does threaten suicide, Grant advised it is important to stop and listen. Even if individuals are only "crying wolf," she continued, they are hinting that something is wrong.

Many people are so wrapped up in tasks—work and school—they have no time to develop human relationships and fail to notice the suicide danger signs in others, Grant said.

When in doubt of whether or not to refer a friend to professionals, Grant said, "err on the side of caution."

"If you're afraid your friend will be angry or upset," she stated, "remember they also might be dead."

Immediacy

Immediacy also is important in determining the

seriousness of a threatened suicide. It depends if the individual is only depressed, Grant explained, or already prepared to commit the act.

If the threat is serious, professional help should be encouraged.

The Outreach Center, a UNL walk-in or phone-in crisis service, has seen recent increases in suicidal tendencies among students, Grant said.

During the 1973 fall semester, 6.6 per cent of Outreach's clients showed suicidal tendencies, she said. That figure dropped to 5.4 in the 1974 spring semester, but was up to 6.7 per cent last semester.

An Outreach worker's response to a suicide threat is different for every individual and situation, Grant said, but it is important for the person to talk it out.

It is a myth that everyone should ignore a suicide threat, she continued, because if no one responds to the threat more dramatic actions may be taken.

Take seriously

"Token" or "toy" suicides should also be taken seriously. Grant warned that a suicide gesture, such as a "slight overdose," can be miscalculated and become a "real statistic."

Reasons for suicides are unique in each situation, Grant said, but speculated that alienation may be a major factor.

"Television has been a double-edged sword for many," she explained, "because it is a dynamic educational tool, but not a very good substitute for personal contact."

Very few people actually want to die, Grant stressed, and the suicide threat indicates they are calling for help.

"In fact, I've never worked with a person whose will to live did not exceed any will to die."

Greater potential

But certain types of people do tend to demonstrate a greater potential for suicide, she added.

Males are more likely to go through with the act, Grant said, and often use more violent means. Females tend to use milder methods of suicide such as an overdose.

According to the state Health Department, 130 Nebraska men committed suicide in 1973 compared to 29 women.

"Females have more ready releases," Grant explained, "because they feel freer to express pent-up emotions."

Other comparatively "high risk" individuals are those widowed or divorced, living alone, unhealthy or shut off from communication with others.

The most common suicide time is early in the morning between 4 and 7, Grant said.

Easy to give in

If a suicidal person is up this early, she explained, everyone else is asleep.

"This is the time it is easy to give in and refuse to face another day."

Dr. Herbert Howe, director of the UNL Psychological Consultation Center, agreed.

"Most people aren't thinking suicide 8 to 5," Howe said.

Dr. Ken Hubble, director of the University Health Center, pointed out other variables relating to suicides.

Suicide rates are usually lower in war years, Hubble said, such as World Wars I and II and the Korean and Vietnam Wars.

"People have their minds on survival," he explained, "rather than destruction."

During bad socio-economic times such as the present, Hubble said, suicides increase.

Statistics do not realistically mirror the situation, Hubble said, because many suicides are labeled accidents.

One student who was ticketed for driving while intoxicated later told Hubble he had been attempting suicide.

If the student had succeeded, Hubble said, the death would have been listed as a traffic fatality, not a suicide.

"Fleeting thoughts concerning death is part of a normal process for people of any age," he said, "but when a student becomes obsessed with that death wish, it is time for concern."

Semester may be bankrupt

Students who experience one or two "bad" semesters may declare "academic bankruptcy," as a result of UNL Faculty Senate action Tuesday.

The proposal was part of the senate Grading Committee's recommendations presented at the Feb. 11 senate meeting. The provision will allow a semester's grades to be removed from consideration in a student's cumulative grade point average (GPA) upon his request.

However, the semester would still appear on the student's transcript, with a slash through it, and he would lose all credit hours for that semester.

Whole semester

Stephen Hilliard, chairman of the committee, said the requirement that all credit for a semester be removed would mean few students would take advantage of the provision.

Franklin Eldridge, president-elect of the senate, recommended that the senate allow students to declare bankruptcy on just a few courses, but Hilliard insisted the committee's intention was that the whole semester must be given up.

Paul Olson, professor of English, said the plan "will not benefit just the poor student."

"But it shows an element of tolerance on the

part of the university, and for this reason I like it," he said.

Gerald Bowker, director of Academic Services, questioned the legality of removing credits from a student's record once they are earned, but the senate still passed the motion, by a voice vote.

The senate also moved that the provision be made effective before the end of the spring semester.

Grading policy

In other action by the grading committee, a motion that "grading policy in a course be stated whenever possible, in written form," also passed by a voice vote.

The senate also passed a resolution brought forward by Olson that the senate "express strong concern that the systems level administration not reject Lincoln campus action by the senate, Academic Planning Committee or central administration without due notice and given reason or without a public hearing of the Board of Regents."

The resolution followed the mention in the report of the Academic Planning Committee of the recently-submitted updated five-year plan.

Olson said he thought the plan "tended to bypass UNL."

daily nebraskan

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Second Class Postage paid at Lincoln, Nebraska.

Address: The Daily Nebraskan, Nebraska Union 34, 14th and R Sts., Lincoln, Neb. 68508. Telephone 402-472-2588.

The Daily Nebraskan is published by the Publications Committee on Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday through the autumn and spring semesters, except on holidays and during vacation.

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Jobs For Summer Look Promising

Informed sources report that summer job opportunities for college students "look good" this year. National Parks, Dude Ranches, Guest Resorts, Private Camps, and other tourist areas throughout the nation are now seeking student applications.

Summer job placement coordinators at Opportunity Research (SAP) report that despite national economic tourist areas are looking for a record season. Polls indicate that people may not go for the big purchases such as new cars, new homes, furniture or appliances, but most appear to be planning for a big vacation.

A free booklet on student job assistance may be obtained by sending a self-addressed stamped envelope to Opportunity Research, Dept. SJO, 55 Flathead Dr., Kalispell, MT 59901. Student job seekers are urged to apply early!

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