

# Suicide Prevention Week proclaimed for May 3-9

By Mary Louise Knapp

In an effort to stem the rising tide of suicides in the United States, the American Association of Suicidology has designated May 3 through 9 as Suicide Prevention Week, a mental health educator said Wednesday.

Jose Soto of the Community Mental Health Center, 2200 St. Mary's Ave., said that during the week the mental health center and social service organizations will provide literature on other information on suicide prevention, including the warning signs of suicidal tendencies, specific steps to take when faced with a suicide crisis and a listing of community resources.

"We want to increase awareness of suicide and help people to recognize suicidal behavior," Soto said.

Some of the warning signs associated with the desire to commit suicide include loss of interest, remarks such as "life isn't worth living," or "I wish I were dead," withdrawing from friends and family, giving away prized possessions or buying a weapon, Soto said.

Severe or chronic depression may occur in both adults and adolescents, but adolescents generally tend to mask depression by acting very happy and carefree, Soto said.

Any type of suicidal behavior should be taken seriously, he said.

### Hopeless and alone

"A lot of people who think about suicide feel hopeless and alone. If their feelings are taken lightly, they will feel that no one understands their problems," he said.

Soto said it is untrue that discussing the problem will encourage a person to commit suicide.

"They will probably be relieved that someone asked them about it," he said.

It is also a myth that people who talk about committing suicide are only doing it to ventilate frustrations and will never really kill themselves, he said. People who talk about suicide will eventually attempt

it, he said.

A supportive attitude is extremely important when dealing with a suicide crisis, Soto said. Making suicidal persons feel guilty by telling them how much they have to live for or that they are "copping out" will only serve to intensify the problem, he said.

Soto said he deals with suicide from the standpoint that a suicidal person really doesn't want to die, but is asking for help.

"Until the last minute of life, people are still ambivalent about dying," he said. "Many times workers are called to the scene of a suicide with them (the suicide victims) dead with their hands on the phone," he said.

### Desperate cry for help

Suicide is "a desperate cry for help, a last attempt to make someone listen," Soto said.

There are as many reasons why people commit suicide as there are experts on the subject, Soto said, but major causes include lack of support from family and friends, stress or the loss of a loved one.

College-age men are more prone to commit suicide over fears of academic failure, while suicide among women is usually triggered by the loss of someone close to them, he said.

Fear of a loss or of failure seems to be the most common trigger for suicide attempts, he said.

While the nationwide suicide rate for people of all ages has remained fairly constant over the past 50 years, the suicide rate for people ages 15 to 24 has tripled in the last 20 years, Soto said.

The nationwide annual suicide ratio is 12.5 for every 100,000 people, Soto said. Nebraska's suicide rate is slightly under that at 9.2.

Soto attributed Nebraska's lower suicide rate to the fact that Midwest families are, on the whole, more cohesive and supportive than families in other parts of the country where the suicide rate is higher.

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