

## **Surviving The Teenage Years - New Efforts to Address Suicide Prevention**

By Jan Hittelman

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There are few things more devastating for a family than the suicide of one of its members. High-risk groups for suicidal behavior include children, adolescents, college students and the elderly. Here are some facts about suicide:

- In the last 45 years suicide rates have increased by 60% worldwide. The World Health Organization estimates that in the year 2000 approximately one million people died from suicide. A global mortality rate of 16 per 100,000. One death every 40 seconds.
- Approximately 32,000 Americans kill themselves every year. The number of suicide attempts is much greater and often results in serious injury.
- In the 2003 Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 20% of Boulder County high school youth reported seriously considering attempting suicide and 16% reported having attempted suicide.
- Nationally, suicide is the third leading cause of death among youth ages 15-24. Approximately 11 youth commit suicide every day.
- In 1998, suicide was the second leading cause of death among college students. One in twelve college students report making a suicide plan.
- The elderly have the highest rate of completed suicides. Nationally, approximately 15 elderly individuals complete suicide daily.
- Firearms are the most common method used for completing suicide.
- Women are three times more likely to attempt suicide than men, but men are four times more likely to complete suicide than women.
- Mental disorders (particularly depression and substance abuse) are associated with more than 90% of all cases of suicide.

As disturbing as these statistics are, it is widely believed that they are underestimated as many suicides and attempts go unreported. The good news is suicide is very preventable, if the right resources and information are in place. Efforts are underway in our community to try and address this issue. A newly formed group, called the Boulder County Suicide Prevention Coalition, is developing training opportunities in February and March for “gatekeepers” (those that are often in contact with high risk groups) as well as community-wide forums to educate the public about warning signs and resources. The founding members of the coalition include: CU Boulder, The Boulder Valley School District, The Parent Engagement Network, The Boulder County Prevention Connection, The Barnett Foundation, Colie’s Closet, Compass House and Boulder County Public Health. The coalition is in the process of recruiting additional community partners. For more information about the coalition, its efforts, and how you can make a difference, please contact Compass House (303) 440-9410.