



# Before Suicide Strikes

By Southeast Health Group

Whether it's a beloved community member, a close relative, or a celebrity, the news of a suicide leaves many people reeling. The recent deaths of fashion designer Kate Spade and CNN's Anthony Bourdain were tragic reminders of the impact of sudden and unexplained loss. The Centers for Disease Control report there has been a steady increase in U.S. suicide rates over the past twenty years. Now more than ever, it's time to talk about mental health, to reach out to vulnerable people, and to support increased access to evidence-based treatment.

Untreated clinical depression is a leading cause of suicidal thoughts and behaviors. However experiences like job and financial loss, family problems, divorce, isolation, severe stress, and low community support, can also be triggers. It's important for people who are feeling suicidal to know they are not alone, and to find the people who are there to help.

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“Our SHG crisis team meets with individuals having a tough time and aren't able to see another way out,” said Terrie Leonard, Crisis Director for Southeast Health Group. “Crisis staff help individuals understand what they are feeling is short-term, and focus on continuing in recovery. We also help with referral to services that are least restrictive, and watch



for the potential of increasing symptoms.”

Leonard is leading a team of mental health workers who will open a new Regional Assessment Center at 721 Barnes Avenue in La Junta later this month. The 12-bed facility will offer acute treatment for individuals who are suicidal, and withdrawal management for those using substances.

“We know that treatment does lead to recovery,” said Leonard, “it's just a matter of knowing the signs, symptoms and being able to refer a person in time to appropriate resources and services. We encourage all community members to take a Mental Health First Aid class so they are prepared to help.”

Mental Health First Aid Colorado has trained and certified over 50,000 individuals, including teachers, first responders, police officers, and individuals who realize the value of mental health awareness. Mental Health First Aiders learn a single five-step strategy that includes assessing risk, respectfully listening to and supporting the individual in crisis, and identifying appropriate professional help and

other supports. Special programs have been developed such as Youth MHFA as well as programs focusing on veterans, rural populations, and specific trainings for law enforcement, firefighters, and EMTs. In fact, a growing number of businesses, including many law enforcement agencies, are requiring MHFA for their employees.

“Our MHFA instructors inform each class they teach on how to access our crisis services when they have someone in a crisis or a referral to outpatient services,” said Leonard. “It's as easy as calling 800-511-5446. We respond 24 hours a day, seven days a week.” Professionals, such as teachers, social workers and others who refer agency to agency can use an online referral form available online at [www.southeasthealthgroup.org](http://www.southeasthealthgroup.org) for non-emergency referrals.

**If you or someone you know is experiencing suicidal feelings, take immediate action. Find hope and help today at Southeast Health Group by calling 800-511-5446. Treatment works, and recovery is possible.**

[www.southeasthealthgroup.org](http://www.southeasthealthgroup.org)