

Ind. suicide rates higher than US average

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The national suicide rate is 11.5 out of 100,000 deaths, but Indiana's rate is higher at 12.5 out of 100,000 deaths.

Numbers such as these hit home this month when Billy Lucas, a student at Greensburg High School, hung himself after enduring bullying because of his sexual orientation, according to reports.

This story does not appear to be an uncommon one.

Suicide is the third leading cause of death in those age 15 to 24, according to the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention's reports in 2007.

Dr. Nancy Stockton, director of IU Health Center's Counseling and Psychological Services, said CAPS takes all suicide threats seriously.

"At busier, more stressful times of the year, these threats come in fairly frequently, several times a week," Stockton said.

She said students oftentimes have not developed coping methods for severe stress. The counselors at CAPS focus on helping students develop these methods rather than turning to self-inflicted harm.

"In spite of pressures of college, a study by Big Ten universities showed the suicide rate for college students is half that of non-college youth," Stockton said.

She said she believes this is because of the resources available to college students to help them through stress and depression.

Greg Chaffin, a Bloomington High School North counselor, said teachers and faculty receive extensive training in identifying at-risk students. The staff is instructed to refer students to the counselors if they appear to be considering suicide.

"Counselors are encouraged to create relationships with our students so they know we can be trusted with sensitive information," Chaffin said. "Most of our student referrals come from other students."

Chaffin said in order to reach a student considering suicide, one must ask direct, clear and solemn questions, such as “Are you thinking about committing suicide? Do you know how you would commit suicide?”

“Nine times out of 10, a student feeling that way will say yes,” he said.

Daniel Lee Miller, director of the film “My Suicide,” founded *www.regenerate.org*, a website for those considering or affected by suicide and other public health issues.

Miller said since suicide is a somewhat taboo topic, those who have considered it often feel isolated and different from those around them.

“The main thing I would say is that when you shatter the silence and start reaching out to people, everyone realizes they aren’t alone,” Miller said.

Stockton agreed that togetherness is the greatest weapon against suicide.

She said CAPS often, with permission, involves family members in student counseling. They also contact friends of the student to find a place for them to stay.

“Caring communities that listen are the greatest protection against suicide,” Stockton said.