

September is National Suicide Prevention Month

September is National Suicide Prevention Month and a time to focus on identifying those individuals who struggle with depression, whether they be children, teens or adults. The recent death of Robin Williams has put in the spotlight depression and the sad fate of some who ultimately take that final step on their dark journey and commit suicide. So many are in emotional pain every day and suffer in silence. We need to reach out to those who suffer, especially our children and teens. Often adolescence is stressful and teens don't know where to turn or who they can talk to. In fact one in eight teens struggle with depression. And, every thirty seconds someone commits suicide every day in our world. As school staff, pediatricians, counselors, pastors, friends and parents, we need to be aware of the signs of depression and reach out to kids and teens who are struggling to get them the help they need so that their journey doesn't end like Robin Williams' and so many others did. We need our children and teens to know that they are not alone. We need them to know to reach out to their school counselors, their parents and to mental health professionals like myself to get the support and help they need to save their lives.

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Preventing Suicide in Children and Adolescents

The week of
September 7th-13th

is National Suicide Prevention Week and September 10th is National Suicide Prevention Day. How timely with the recent death of celebrity Robin Williams who lost his battle with the darkness of depression. The death of Robin Williams has shook many to their core. After all, how could a man who seemingly had it all and made everyone laugh so readily be hurting so bad inside that he would take that final step? Robin Williams' tragic death has brought some much needed attention to depression, suicide and mental health. In fact, in the 24 hours following the news of his death, the National Suicide Hotline reported the second highest number of calls in one day to their hotline since the beginning of 2014.

Every 30 seconds somewhere someone in the world takes their own life because of depression. That is a sobering statistic. And sadly many who struggle with depression do not get help for many reasons.

Kevin Breel, a popular comedian from Vancouver, Canada is the perfect example of a successful person, an entertainer nonetheless that looks like he has it all together but struggles inside with depression. He was popular in high school, an athlete, an honors student and appeared to have everything going for him until he almost took his own life at the age of 17. Today Kevin still struggles with depression and simply being able to get out of bed and face the day most mornings. You would never guess from watching him make others laugh though.

Michelle is a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor who specializes in Child, Adolescent and Family Counseling. She has spent seventeen plus years working at several family counseling agencies with kids and parents and has her own counseling practice located in the Healthy Living Counseling Center in Palatine. She is also a mom of two school aged children.

Contact Michelle at (847)302-1196 for a free phone consultation.

*Her services include:
Individual Therapy*

-Family Therapy

-Play Therapy

-Parenting Support

-Consultation with psychiatrists, school staff, and pediatricians

-Referrals to other providers



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Kevin is now an advocate for mental health and speaks to many about getting help and getting rid of the stigma that depression and other mental health diagnoses still carry today. He talks about how when we have a broken limb, everyone runs over to sign our cast but when we admit depression, everyone runs the other way.

Depression affects not only adults but also children. According to an article in the August issue of Children's Health on the Everyday Health website, as many as 1 in 33 children and 1 in 8 teens suffer from depression. Research also shows that children as young as preschool age are suffering from the disease as well. Depression is not quickly treated. It can endure for some time. Research shows that a child who suffers one episode of depression has a 20-60% chance of another episode within the next two years and almost a 70% chance of another episode within five years.

Is It Depression?

To help you consider whether a child/teen might be struggling from depression, consider the following questions:

1. Is there a family history of depression? Depression has a genetic link and tends to run in families.
2. Has there been a stressful life event in the child's life (divorce, separation, health problems, loss of a loved one)? These events that bring about big changes in a child's life can trigger depression.

How Can Parents Help?

- First, seek help from a counselor to evaluate whether your child/teen has depression.
- Consistently attend counseling appointments and work your child's counselor on ways you can support your child.
- Ensure that your child has a healthy diet and takes any medications regularly. What we put in our bodies can really impact our moods.
- Have a consistent sleep schedule for your child. Too little sleep can cause irritability and worsen mood/depression.
- Make sure that your child is active in sports or some exercise. Exercise releases endorphins, those "feel good" chemicals in your brain. Exercise can also relieve stress which can trigger depression or exacerbate it.
- Communicate with your child and let him/her know that you are there for support and to talk about anything that may be on his/her mind.
- Praise your child whenever you can especially for his/her efforts. Frequently children with depression struggle with completing tasks like homework or chores. Sometimes just getting out of bed every day is success.

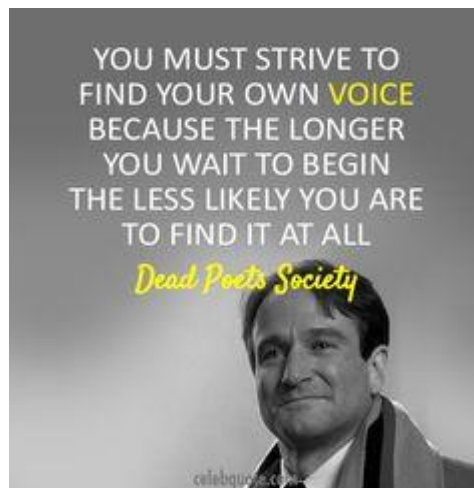


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3. Is the child exhibiting the following signs of depression:
- Frequent and persistent depressed mood or irritability. In children, depression frequently presents as irritability or being “on edge” instead of sadness.
 - Loss of interest in daily activities or previously enjoyed activities
 - Significant change in weight or appetite
 - Change in sleep patterns, including sleeping too much or too little
 - Loss of energy or fatigue
 - Excessive guilt or feelings of worthlessness
 - Difficulty concentrating
 - Frequent thoughts of death, dying, suicide or a suicide attempt

If the above symptoms cause problems in a child’s ability to function at home, at school or with their peers, they may be struggling with clinical depression. Seek out a counselor or other mental health professional to have an evaluation. If diagnosed, children and teens can benefit from weekly counseling sessions to explore their emotions, triggers and coping skills. Often, psychotropic medication, like antidepressants, can also help.



How To Get Help

If you are concerned about your child or teen, reach out for help through counseling. Michelle DeLaRosa is a licensed clinical professional counselor who specializes in counseling services for children and adolescents. Contact Michelle for a free phone consultation at (847)302-1196 or email her at mdelarosatherapy@yahoo.com. You can also visit her counseling practice website, michelledelarosatherapy.com, for more information about her services



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Is Your Smartphone Ruining Your Sleep?

By Michelle DeLaRosa, LCPC
Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor

68 % of teens in a 2014 survey reported that they sleep with a smartphone, tablet or other device on all night. According to an article in Chicago's Daily Herald on Sept 5, 2014, Research released this week suggests that use of technology devices like smartphones before bed can interfere with good quality sleep and, worse yet, impact on current and future health. Teens and adults alike use technology throughout the day and often check emails and texts, tweet, post on Facebook, go on snap chat, and upload their latest photos to Instagram. But unfortunately researchers have found to the detriment of their sleep quality. The blue light generated from our devices tricks our brains into thinking that it is daytime, not bedtime. This in turn inhibits the production of melatonin, a hormone essential for sleep. However, melatonin is also involved in maintaining a healthy immune system and fighting illness. Too little melatonin from repeat nightly use of smartphones (and even other electronics like TV and computers) has now been shown to affect the ability to recover from illnesses that an individual might face in the future, such as cancer and heart disease. More immediately, this research also suggests a link to irritable and depressed mood in the morning. With teens who are already struggling with depression, this night time ritual is having a negative impact.

How to Create Good Sleep For Your Child Or Teen

-Turn all electronic devices off an hour before bed. This includes TV, cell phones, computers, and video games.

-Have them engage in a quiet activity before bed like reading or, with young children, creative activities like Legos.

-Develop a consistent sleep routine, going to bed the same time every night.

-Know how much sleep is needed for your child's or teen's age.



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The Facebook logo, consisting of the word "facebook" in white lowercase letters on a blue rectangular background.A large, bold, black question mark.

Facebook. Is Social Media Making Us More Social Or Less?

By Michelle DeLaRosa, LCPC
Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor

The Facebook logo with a large red 'X' drawn over it, indicating a negative or critical perspective.

With Facebook reaching its 10 year anniversary earlier this year, it has become part of our everyday culture. Teens and adults alike log on to the popular social media site to share thoughts, opinions, musings and photos as well as generate support for different causes. Its original intent was to promote social interactions and connect with others, but is it really successfully doing that? For many teens and adults alike, Facebook creates the illusion of social relationships, especially for those who struggle with friendships and peer interactions in everyday life. However, it is also creating or worsening depression among many teens especially as they observe their friends' "highlight reels". They are inundated with all the social gatherings that they weren't invited to and all the fun that their friends are supposedly having. For teens who already have a difficult time socializing, this can make them feel even worse about themselves. Unfortunately, Facebook also allows people to be bolder in the things that they say than if they were face to face with people. This can result in bullying especially because most teens are friends with just about everyone on Facebook from their school instead of their actual circle of friends. In my experience as a counselor, Facebook is not always a good thing for teens. The social media site is great in providing groups and forums for people with a common issue. As a mom of a child with a severe peanut allergy, I have found a parent support group that has given me lots of knowledge, news and an ability to connect with others in that struggle with a food allergy. However, I also have worked with several teen clients who have found Facebook pages devoted to individuals who self injure. In one case, the teen had never self injured but was looking for a place to belong. Needless to say, she eventually tried self injury. So what do we do when a teen is struggling and their use of Facebook is not making life any better? I always encourage parents to monitor their child's/teen's social media use, either by friending them, having their password or having another trustworthy sometimes younger family member be friends with them to monitor activity. Also, talk to your teen about only friending people they actually know on Facebook, not a friend of their friend. If your teen struggles emotionally, limit their use. There is no need for them to be spending hours on Facebook if it's only going to make them feel worse after they log off. Finally, encourage your teen to continue to socialize with their friends in real life. Encourage them to invite friends over or go to Starbucks's or out to eat. That way they are actually socializing and learning important social skills.



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