

## **A Sad Stat: Teenage Suicides on the Rise**

OSF HealthCare Newsroom

Shelli Dankoff – Media Relations Supervisor

In addition to sharing guidance for navigating the COVID-19 virus, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has been tracking a lot of data throughout the pandemic. One of the sad statistics: [suicide attempts increased among adolescents aged 12 to 17](#), especially young girls.

From February 2021 to March 2021 average weekly visits to the emergency department for suspected suicide attempts among young girls were up more than 50% from the same period a year ago. OSF HealthCare Children's Hospital of Illinois in Peoria has seen an increase in emergency department visits as well.

The study says the data likely underrepresents the real number of suspected suicide attempts because people were hesitant to go to hospitals during the pandemic, in fear of contracting Covid-19.

"We often thought like teenage years and that that's a challenging time, but we're getting kids of a younger age and especially girls. Now there's lots of information and lots of research really targeting those girls because that's a different need. There's a comparison, their bodies against each other and social media, and there's also, peer relationships, and just what we call Mean Girls. I hear a lot of those kinds of things, of feeling left out or not feeling good enough," explains Bernice Gordon-Young, LCPC, a psychotherapist with OSF HealthCare who treats both children and adults.

Gordon-Young listens to the challenges faced by those who come to her. Some of what she has heard over the past 16 months during the pandemic is of great concern.

"There are things like self-harming. There's a lot of vaping going on, they're also getting access to edibles, and they're coming through the mail. Those are coming to your homes, many homes, and parents just don't know. They find people who have access, and it just gets distributed to them. And that's how they're coping in an unhealthy way. That's why I really work with our kids because they will share - if we listen to them without judgment - they'll share with us. If it's not happening to them, what's happening around them," says Gordon-Young.

That's why Gordon-Young says it's important to talk to children, and, more importantly, to *listen* to them.

According to the CDC report, the disruption of daily life as teens and young adults knew it before the pandemic - with lockdowns and social distancing orders - may have contributed to the rise in suicide attempts.

The influence of social media may get some of the blame for what young people are going through, but Gordon-Young sees both good *and* bad influences from it.

"There are numerous factors that our children are facing when they're on social media. There is homophobia, there is racism, and there's bullying. So they are seeking assistance or seeking acceptance in some of the places that may hurt them the most. And so we have to monitor that as well."

"Sometimes they spend too much time on social media, and they're not socializing and they're losing that component. So isolation has become their norm, then they have difficulty reintegrating back into society. Since we were disconnected for so long."

One of the positive outcomes from the pandemic is the expansion of telehealth services, which has opened and extended counseling and other mental health services to those in need, especially in more rural areas. Gordon-Young was counseling people around the world because the need was so great.

She says regardless of where the call was coming from, the concerns, for the most part, were the same - they wanted to know when they were going to be okay, how to help make things be okay, and they needed to hear that it's okay not to be okay, something Olympic gymnast Simone Biles has called attention to.

Gordon-Young says to watch for signs that something isn't quite right, and know there are resources out there to help.

"Eating disorders or something else that has become more problematic for numerous reasons. Anxiety is often related to eating disorders, sometimes depression as well. There are numerous mentoring programs. It's also important to get the kids involved in something, there are camps that are going on this summer. Get them out of the house, let them have some fun. It's really important to recognize that there are resources out here, and there are resources that don't cost anything."

There are a variety of [programs and services](#) offered throughout the communities served by OSF HealthCare and through [It Takes A Village](#), the 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization established by Gordon-Young as a support system for children, families and other individuals.