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Suicide Prevention Month: Hope and Help are Available

September is National Suicide Prevention Month, a time dedicated to raising awareness, reducing stigma, and encouraging conversations about mental health. While mental health challenges can affect anyone, suicide is preventable, and every member of the community can play a role in recognizing warning signs and connecting individuals to support services.

According to mental health experts, early intervention and community support are essential in preventing suicide. Many people experiencing a mental health crisis may not immediately seek professional help. Instead, they may first turn to a trusted friend, family member, coworker, or faith leader.

Warning signs that someone may be struggling can include talking about feeling hopeless, withdrawing from friends and family, increased use of alcohol or drugs, giving away possessions, or talking about wanting to die. Mental health professionals emphasize that asking someone if they are thinking about suicide does not increase risk; in fact, open and compassionate conversations can help reduce feelings of isolation and encourage someone to reach out for help.

Kansas has made notable progress in improving access to mental health care in recent years, yet experts agree that continued awareness, education, and community engagement remain critical. Building supportive communities and reducing stigma surrounding mental illness can help ensure that individuals feel comfortable seeking help when they need it.

For residents of Southeast Kansas, help is available close to home. Crawford County residents have access to the Crawford County Mental Health Center; Wilson and Montgomery County residents can reach out to their local Four County Mental Health clinic; and Labette County residents can find help through the Labette Center for Mental Health Services. Individuals experiencing a mental health crisis can call or text **988**, the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Trained mental health professionals are available around the clock to provide support and connect people with appropriate care.

This Suicide Prevention Month, community members are encouraged to check in on family, friends, neighbors, and coworkers. A simple conversation, a listening ear, or a connection to resources can make a significant impact.

For more information, visit <https://afsp.org/> or contact Arianna Oehme, Wildcat Extension District Nutrition and Community Wellness Agent, at aoehme@ksu.edu or (620) 724-8233.

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