

**Supporting Our Teens
In a High-Pressure Environment:
A Multifaith Community Response**

**Monday, August 31, 7:00-9:00 PM
Cubberley Theatre, Palo Alto**

RELIGION:

Will not religion be the goal of a depressive teen, a place where they can go for relief from depression?

Does your religion glorify or make the afterlife less scary?

How will “faith group” promote vertical communication between the generations, specifically parents to child? Proactive from parent to adolescent recommended?

How to reach out to teenagers opposed to or closed off from religion that are without hope?

Teenagers never lean on religion or religious philosophies to feel good. So can we discuss real solutions?

Face it; religion (especially organized) is not cool ... at least to kids. While you can preach and draw parents into religious communities, how will we draw kids ... especially kids in deep need?

What about people who don't believe in god? Would you still love/support your children if they killed someone, told you they were gay, etc.?

How do you help an atheist child of different faiths than yours?

I realize this is a forum focused on a faith community approach, but the reality is. The majority of the kids in our area do not have a formal religion or religious upbringing. And they're turned off by dogmatic or overly doctrinaire approaches. How do we reach them?

Where can faith communities offer places of refuge, self-exploration and places to serve – that doesn't require going to a church or temple?

Could each of the panelists please briefly describe the core/key beliefs of their faith? In other words, what is someone who chooses to follow that faith is choosing to believe in? This question is particularly important to me as a psychologist because questions of religion and faith often come up during therapy

with teens. I'd really love to understand more about the beliefs of each of these faiths so that I can objectively support my patients as they work to understand faith and religion/spirituality in their own lives.

What is the faith community's support of psychological counseling and what is available?

What options are available at the local faith based meeting places for adults and children to get help for alcohol and other addiction problems? AA or Alanon?

I am a mental health professional. I like to work with people of various faiths and sometimes find it useful to interface with their clergy. How can we better connect mental health service providers with clergy of various faiths? How can we help kids feel okay and safe about expressing concern for a friend who may be having trouble or behaving differently?

What is the role of the religious community in fighting stigma? Putting a hand out and accepting a hand back?

MENTAL HEALTH:

Do we do enough to describe how strange depression can be? Not only sadness, but feelings of not having emotional energy or impaired learning ability, or a sense of futility of action or of certainty of loneliness? After helping people recognize depression, we can emphasize how treatable it is.

How can we de-stigmatize mental illness?

Has anyone checked to see what medications, if any, the suicidal students (including any who were successfully stopped) were taking? Sometimes patients react badly to medications that were intended to help them. It would be important to know if certain medications increase the risk of suicide so they can be avoided.

Do you know what happens when you are a danger to yourself? They lock you up on 72 hour hold with the seriously ill. There needs to be another level.

We seem to hear that these three kids were “in treatment.” The advice often given is to make sure kids get treatment for depression. Is it the treatment that fails children and teens? Especially in these cases?

Where is the place for discussion about mental health needs diagnosis, treatment, and resources for our young people and insurance to pay for it?

Martin Monica

martinjmonica@yahoo.com

408-771-6946

Education, awareness, interest, engaged, involved for mental illness? All suicides. PLEASE.

I would like to be involved in the dialogue about teens and their issues – including suicide.

Kathleen A. Kunster, PsyD

Registered Psychological Assistant PSB 33428

650-996-8748

katknst@sbcglobal.net

Of the young people who committed suicide, my questions are:

- 1) were they being treated by a therapist;
- 2) were any on anti-depressant medication; and
- 3) Were they active members of a religious community?

AS A COMMUNITY:

How can we as a community reach out and help to foster this support of children in our community?

How are we as a community helping parents realign their expectations from their children? For example, maybe help them introspect and see what they were at their kid's age. That, I think will help bring down stress and increase acceptance.

Are there other upcoming events for teens?

How do we specifically help young people realize that help from adults is desirable when they live in such a peer-oriented social climate?

While what has been said is touching and meaningful to me as a 67 yr old, I don't quite understand how we equip a 14 yr old with this wisdom. Any suggestions?

I want each Palo Alto kid to feel that there are lots of adults around who believe in them as unique individuals – who are the village you spoke of. How can we achieve this here? What needs to change?

How can we do a better job of building community – amidst our busy lives? I was struck at the spring ACS Forum how isolated families feel who confront depression. What are steps we can take to do a better job of reaching out to support each other and truly love our neighbors?

Question for the Mayor: It is nice that city calls upon the clergy but what is the city doing:

- 1) Is there a budget to keep police cars at the crossings of the railroad tracks?
- 2) Won't the high speed rail be a more alluring "solution" for those depressed?
- 3) What is law enforcement doing with the community to stop and educate students?

Are there plans for any 12 step programs, AA and/or Alanon for teens? If not, why not?

How can we encourage children in our community to discover their spiritual nature when so few attend church and a dialogue about this is not available in schools?

How do we identify a youth in trouble ... in education, in recreation, in our personal friends?

I think that it would be a good idea for the citizens to take turns standing guard at the railroad tracks.

PARENTING:

Advice on how to balance any of the below: praise/punishment; encouragement/pressure; activities/boredom; responsibilities/stress; achievement/struggle; being available/hovering; supporting/weakening; expectations/disappointments; questioning/prying?

What do I do to help my daughter who does not want to talk about suicide?

What about discipline, the willingness of parents to say no and follow through. Violence of video games, movies, drugs, food!

I'm afraid that if I uphold the values I believe in (doing homework, going to school, not doing drugs, not staying out at night), my son will respond by threatening me with suicide. How should I handle this?

How can I counsel my child concerning dealing with stress?

My son graduated from Gunn in 2004. I asked him his thoughts on the recent events. He said that he believes that the key is for the parents to have active communication with and support their children, not just expectations. Empower, support them and validate their feelings.

Where is the right balance between too many rules/boundaries for teens and not enough?

My family, including my 9th grader at Gunn, is not religious. It's really painful and confusing when we heard her friend hit the train a week ago. Would it be helpful if I take her and join a religious group?

How can I handle my own fear?

Please tell the audience about the Parent Project seminar offered through the PAUSD and the PA Police Dept. It is a valuable support group for parents in the community. There's also a yahoo group: palo-alto-parenting-teens@yahoogroups.com

How can I communicate with my teen about suicide without sounding frightened?

What does it mean to be a parent? Do we need to ask our youth what they think the need is? Do we have a double standard, one for youth and one for adults when it comes to ethics and morals – consumerism. Do we put too much emphasis on grades and not enough on logic? What do we need to do to give youth self-worth?

SEXUALITY:

What role do struggles or questions about teen sexual identity play in the teen suicide or attempted suicide rate? Do we know whether this has been a factor in any of the recent suicides?

How do we teach adolescents to refrain from being sexually active and that promiscuity or early experiences are not desirable?

What can we do to minimize the impact in our community of evidence that gay, lesbian, transgendered, and bisexual youth are at 3-4 times more at risk of suicide relative to their peers?

Thank you to all the panelists for being here and speaking of love, support and inclusivity. Please share your thoughts on how to engage the faith community in conversations around supporting and including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender youth, who are at very high risk for suicide. Thank you!

INFLUENCES ON KIDS TODAY:

“Supporting Our Teens in a High-Pressure Environment? Lower the pressure? If so, how?”

Children sometimes fear they will succumb to suicide after hearing of other youngsters killing themselves.

Do any of you think that messages shared by teenagers on the internet have anything to do with suicides?

I heard an “undisclosed survey” of Gunn students that 25% of the students think that “suicide is heroic.” Is this true? Why is that? Is it caused by media news report like “suicidal” bombing, etc.?

Can you address the role of thought and suffering for teenagers? I feel this is important to look at.

How do kids listen to reason when (mainstream) culture inundates their lives with life negative affirmations and advocates, drug use, immorality, and violence?

How are you, as adults, going to combat this? Gunn isn't the only place with high academic pressure – how do we give each student their “purpose” without overstressing this idea of reaching out? --Gunn High Senior

Want to hear from high school kids today why their peers committed suicide.

Is there anything specific to Palo Alto that you feel contributes? How do we reach our teens when they are already in pain?

With the drug industry pushing a pill for every so-called sickness and parents pushing the kids to use them how do you expect to stop drug use? It becomes a habit.

We seem to be able to connect with the “low hanging fruit” of kids who are more visibly depressed, or troubled. But how do we reach the more hidden, troubled person?

How do we help our teenage communities now – those with unidentified issues and how do we help teens cope with the loss of their friends?

What if children are not supportive of adult values, priorities, and ways of behaving but don't have a way to express their sides or challenge their feelings?

MISC:

What do you think is the key ingredient as we come together?

Where in our schools is there opportunity to explore pain and death in an unpressured atmosphere. Are there classes that encourage this kind of exploration?

If time, please do invite JP's uncle.

We have known since the second Gunn suicide at the same location that we have a "suicide contagion" situation in Palo Alto. The CDC and the Worth Health Organization have studied these matters in depth and have very clear recommendations and advice on how to prevent and stop such suicide contagions. The way the situation has been handled by the counseling agency, the press, the schools, etc., have not been in compliance with the CDC/WHO evidence based advice and recommendation. Why is this? And what are relevant agencies going to do to correct the situation?

I believe having common, public open space which is restful and beautiful is very beneficial to youth – to just allow them to "be." What do you think the City of Palo Alto can do to increase its parkland? My daughter, now 19, gathered at Mitchell Park with her friends. I'd like to see public gathering places in all new developments be made available. Thank you for your consideration.

A lot of adults are afraid to express interest in kids for fear of being seen as perverts. How do we remedy that?