

October 2015

The Advocate

The Wichita Area Sexual Assault Center newsletter

Suicide and Sexual Violence

Robin Bariel
Outreach Advocate I

As advocates, we often hear suicidal ideation from people who have experienced sexual violence. These comments can be indirect, “No one would miss me if I wasn’t here.” They can be direct, “I want to kill myself”, or a range of statements in between. Hearing comments like this can be distressing. If you work with people who have experienced sexual violence, including child sexual abuse, it is possible you also work with people who are or have been suicidal. Although research is sparse, studies indicate childhood sexual abuse increases the risk of suicide by 3-5 times for teens and adults.



Sexual assault advocates often use the term “survivor” to talk about people who have experienced sexual assault. While intended to be empowering, “survivor” for some may imply that the trauma is in the past. For instance, this could imply that the survivor has already been through the worst part of the trauma. However, if a survivor is struggling with thoughts of taking their own life, this may not match their experience. It is important to meet folks where they are in their healing and use appropriate language.

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Wichita Area Sexual Assault Center

OVERLAPPING RISK FACTORS:

- Many of the factors that can increase an individual's risk for attempting or completing a suicide, are exacerbated by a traumatic experience. Following a sexual assault, people can be depressed, anxious, suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), self-medicate using alcohol or drugs, or feel hopeless or helpless. These symptoms are all risk factors for suicide. Other risk factors for suicide can be experiencing a loss or lack of access to mental health services.
- After a sexual assault, taking their own life could be the only choice a person feels is in their control. Demanding a client to promise not commit suicide can be counterproductive, as they may feel like the last of their control has been taken away. When working with a client, it is more effective to brainstorm healthier coping options and refer them to a mental health provider.
- Similar to sexual violence, suicide is a topic that many people are uncomfortable addressing or talking about. This culture of silence increases the stigma for both sexual violence and suicide, and ultimately makes it more difficult for people to seek help. Using a trauma-informed approach can create safe spaces for people to disclose about their past or current struggles.



BEST PRACTICES:

- You may want to ask clients directly what their thoughts of suicide are. Researchers and mental health professionals agree you will NOT “plant the idea” of suicide by bringing it up with a client.
- Effectively respond to every disclosure of suicide or suicidal thoughts. When we talk about suicide attempts as a “cry for help” or “attention seeking behavior,” we diminish the experience. Additionally, debunk blaming statements of suicide when you hear them. People who commit suicide are not weak or selfish; they were valuable members of the community who were in pain.
- Create a safety plan with every client who shares thoughts of suicide or self-harm. Ask direct questions about firearms, poison, medications, or knives and razors. Safety planning includes creating ways to secure these items, such as with locks or by giving them to someone the client trusts.

BEST PRACTICES:

- Familiarize yourself with community resources. Where can someone go to talk about a sexual assault they experienced? Who can someone call if they are feeling suicidal? What agencies in the community provide services for someone in crisis?
- An example of a supporting statement you can use to start a conversation about suicide:
 1. “It sounds like you feel hopeless about your future. Can you tell me a bit more about that?”

WASAC Hotline

316-263-3002

One of the core services WASAC provides for Sedgwick County is a 24-hour, live-answer crisis line. You can reach a trained crisis counselor any time of the day or night, every day of the year. This line is designed to support people who are impacted by sexual violence, to answer questions about other WASAC services, and to provide referrals to other services that might be needed following a sexual assault.

The crisis line routes through an exchange service. When a caller dials in, the service will momentarily place the caller on hold while they connect to a crisis counselor. Then the service will patch the caller through to the counselor.

WASAC
Education

October 21: 6:00 -7:30 p.m.
Protective Parenting Program

October 27: 12:00 - 1:00 p.m.
WASAC Lunch and Learn
Protection Orders
Risks & Benefits

Information: 316-263-0185
Free & Confidential

WASAC crisis counselors receive (at least) 40 hours of training on the dynamics of sexual violence prior to assisting on the hotline. They are prepared to support callers in whatever phase they are in on their healing journey.

Callers do not have to be “in crisis” to call our 24-hour crisis line. The hotline is available for family and friends to seek support, or for professionals to ask about services or referrals. The crisis line is completely confidential and free for all callers.

If you or someone you know is talking about suicide, please call the suicide prevention hotline available 24 hours a day/7 days a week.

COMCARE Hotline
316-660-7500

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RESOURCES:

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 800-273-TALK
<http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/suicide/risk-protectivefactors.html>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NSHnzRleIBE>

WASAC Happenings

Amy Nickell Volunteer Coordinator



Amy is WASAC's new Volunteer Coordinator. Amy's role includes training and working directly with all the WASAC volunteer advocates. Amy will also coordinate volunteer activities and schedules for advocates assisting on the 24-hour hotline and responding to the hospital.

Amy said that being able to interact with every advocate, helping them develop, and the opportunity to support survivors by encouraging and empowering advocates is her favorite part of the job. "I believe that being involved with the growth of each volunteer will promote better advocacy for the survivors we serve and a sense of wellness and compassion for advocates."

Amy enjoys spending time with her daughter, being outdoors, and reading in her free time. Amy is also actively involved with Girl Scouts of Kansas Heartland as a troop leader, and supports local charities and community organizations.

If you would like additional information about becoming a WASAC volunteer, please contact Amy at 316-263-0185 or Amy@wichitasac.com. Please join us as we welcome Amy to the WASAC family!

Art and Writing Workshops are
BACK!!

Creating Self-Compassion for
survivors of sexual violence.

Refer clients, family & friends

Please see flyer for details.



Wichita Area Sexual Assault Center presents



Creating Self-Compassion

Art & Writing Workshops for Survivors of Sexual Violence

Free and confidential

8 week groups

All supplies provided

Art workshop

(adult mixed gender group)

Monday evenings 6 - 7:30 PM
October 5 - November 23

(adult female only group)

Monday evenings 6 - 7:30 PM
February 8 - March 28, 2016

Writing workshop

(adult female only group)

Wednesday evenings 6:00 - 7:30 PM
September 30 - November 18

(adult mixed gender group)

Wednesday evenings 6:00 - 7:30 PM
February 3 - March 30, 2016

Pre-registration is required for all groups. Group size is limited.

If you are interested in one or both groups, please call Mary or Kathy at (316) 263-0185 or email advocate@wichitasac.com. Once you are confirmed for the group, we will send you details about the location of the group and meeting space. If you are interested in other services offered by the Wichita Area Sexual Assault Center, visit us at www.wichitasac.com.



WICHITA AREA SEXUAL ASSAULT CENTER

Lunch & Learn 2015

~~~~ NEW MEETING PLACE~~~~

Bring your lunch and join us from 12:00 p.m.-1:00 p.m. on the last Tuesday of each month. Come learn more about the reality of sexual violence.

Free and open to all! No RSVP required.

Oct 27: Risk & benefits of protection orders

Nov 24: Holiday challenges and “traumaversaries”

Dec 29: Warning signs of stalking

Lunch & Learn sessions are held at the
Wichita Public Library-Central Location
Patio Room-1st floor, 223 S. Main

For more information, please call 316-263-0185



Wichita Area Sexual Assault Center

Adult women (18+)

- Support group
Tuesday, 5:30 - 6:30 pm
- Trauma-sensitive yoga
Tuesday, 6:30 - 7:30 pm

Teen girls (13-17)

- Support group
Monday, 5:30 - 6:30 pm
- Trauma-sensitive yoga
Monday, 6:30 - 7:30 pm

Parents and caregivers

- Support group
Monday, 6:45 - 7:30 pm

WASAC also offers short-term individual therapy for women, men, and children. To schedule an appointment, please call our office between 8:30 am and 5:00 pm.

WASAC support groups are confidential, free, and open to survivors at any point in their healing. All groups meet weekly and are open-ended, with no appointment necessary to participate. At this time, child care is not available.

WASAC office

355 N Waco,
Suite 100

SW corner of 3rd/Waco

316-263-0185