

**“Don’t be ashamed of your story – it will inspire others.”**

*-Anonymous*

## From Suicidal To Hopeful: Teens Can Recover

*Names of students in this article have been changed to protect their privacy.*

*Raegan Craddock*

“I felt like a stress factor to everyone... my parents were always fighting, and I felt bothersome,” says Nation Ford High School student, Emma. Emma is one of a number of students who attempted to end her life, but now is proud to say that for the most part, she’s happy. Nationally, there are about 12 people per every 100,000 who take their own lives. South Carolina’s average is 14 per every 100,000. The community wonders why so many Nation Ford students have attempted or followed through with taking their own lives.

“The reason it keeps happening, is because it has happened,” said Lane Liotta, Lead Clinician of the Fort Mill School District’s Behavioral & Mental Health Services. Mrs. Liotta says this issue has nothing at all to do with the school itself. *The Contagion of Suicidal Behavior* is a theory written by Columbia University and the New York Psychiatric Institute based on studies of media reports of suicide, suicide clusters, and the impact of the exposure of adolescents to a suicidal peer. These factors are what Mrs. Liotta believes is to be the main cause of the misfortunes of the school.

After Emma’s diagnosis, she was admitted into a facility in Connecticut by the name of *Silver Hill Mental Health Hospital*, where she stayed for two weeks and received treatment. “It [the facility] was terrifying... but in the long run was a huge help,” explained Emma. She described her experience as being kept mostly in isolation, but she also discussed how being isolated was what she needed.

“Had I not been locked up for a while, I would have really followed through with ending my life... Looking back on it now I’m glad I didn’t,” she said.

Major red flags that signal suicidal feelings are giving away possessions, reconnecting with past loved ones, saying goodbyes, taking unnecessary risks, and making threats of violence online. The most common signal from Nation Ford students has been direct verbalization in expressing suicidal thoughts, according to Mrs. Liotta.

“Depression knows no socioeconomic boundary,” explains Mrs. Liotta. Depression is more common among males and younger middle school students. This disease also tends to be seasonal, hitting people harder than any other time during the winter. According to Mental Health America, 30 - 70 percent of suicide victims suffered from major depression or bipolar disorder. Also, over 20 percent of suicides involve people with alcohol and/or drug related problems.

In the event a suicide occurs within the Fort Mill School District, crisis teams are brought into the affected school to provide assistance and counseling for students and teachers in the classes the child attended and to whomever else should need help.

Teachers and staff are trained to know how to handle speaking and providing emotional aid to students in those times of need as well. The school is currently working with the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) to install a suicide awareness program in all HS101 classes in the district, teaching the students what to watch for and how to handle a peer with suicidal thoughts.

“My life has turned around significantly,” explains Emma. “I have a loving girlfriend who I also love very much, my parents have learned how to handle me, and I actually see a future for myself. For the most part I’m happy.”

Her depression is linked to a chemical imbalance within her brain. She encourages anyone with suicidal thoughts or depressed thoughts

### SIX PROVEN WAYS TO HEAL FROM DEPRESSION NATURALLY, WITHOUT MEDICATION

*According to Psychologist Karen Young’s website: ‘Hey Sigmund’*



#### OMEGA-3

Filling your diet with supplements such as Omega-3 instead of sugar supplements encourages the construction of new brain cells and reduces symptoms of depression.



#### YOUR THOUGHTS

Rumination is the act of dwelling on the same thought(s) repeatedly. Doing this allows your stress hormones to attack your hippocampus, which is the part of your brain holding your memories. This allows your hippocampus to shrink, inevitably causing depression. A way to avoid rumination is to avoid spending time alone.



#### SURROUNDINGS

The human brain mistakenly interprets depression as an infection, making someone affected isolate themselves from other people. Doing this encourages rumination. Spend time with people that care about you.



#### EXERCISE

Being active releases key neurochemicals that help to elevate energy levels, mood, and motivation. Research shows that walking for 30 minutes 3 times a week has the same neurological effects on the brain as the antidepressant Zoloft.



#### SUNLIGHT

Being deprived of sunlight can have an impact on the level of serotonin in the body. Also, Light Therapy is an existent method of treatment for depression that has similar effects to antidepressant medication.



#### REST

Although this may seem obvious, 8 hours of sleep is essential for the day-to-day human life. Sleep is a healing power, you need it.

*Infographic by Raegan Craddock*

in general to see a counselor or a licensed therapist to learn how to cope with those feelings.

“There are still bad moments where I feel like relapsing...but I do different exercises and now am usually able to calm myself down,” Emma said.

Nation Ford High provides several services to help students to a better state with their mental health. Students are able to visit the guidance office as many times as needed. If students need help outside of school, the counselors will assist in finding and setting up appointments with licensed therapists.

“From experience, taking prescription drugs that are not your own such as Xanax, may feel like it is depleting your depression or the impact your depression has on your life – but really all it is doing is blocking out your depression for a short period of time and ultimately, when the high is gone, drugs do nothing but feed into your depression,” explains another NFHS student, Brandon.

If a student is suffering from a drug problem, NFHS works with the organization Keystone to help students through drug therapy. Members working with Keystone will make appointments to come to NFHS and counsel at the school. If students are 16 or older, they are able to sign their own consent form, meaning their parent(s) or guardian(s) do not have to be notified about

the issues they are having or the treatment.

For the students who are afraid of making a friend angry or upset by reaching out to get help for them. “At the risk of [temporarily] losing a friendship, you could risk losing a friend,” Mrs. Liotta said.

Mrs. Liotta explains that if a loved one is expressing signs of being suicidal, it is most effective to get professional or licensed help. It is human nature to want to attempt to heal a loved one personally, but there are too many feelings involved to provide the help that the person really needs, she said.

“I honestly don’t think that my friends could have helped much...when you’re that depressed clinical help is what you need,” Emma said. “I had a friend who was in a really bad place after I had gotten significantly better. I contemplated not telling her mom for a while, but after an attempt to commit suicide, I felt like I had no other option but to tell her mother. That wasn’t something I could fix myself – she needed a doctor.”

That person has gotten significantly better after receiving treatment, according to Emma.

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is available 24/7 to talk to anyone who needs emotional support at 1-800-273-8255. Also, there is a 24/7 addiction and mental health counseling hotline available at 1-800-821-4357 for help with an alcohol or drug problem, and other mental illnesses.

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