

Parents not at fault in teen-ager's suicide

Dear Ann Landers: The 17-year-old son of our dearest friends committed suicide. We are in a state of shock. This boy was one of the brightest, sweetest, best-looking, most popular lads in school. He was an achiever, admired, respected and loved. He excelled in sports, did not smoke nor drink and, so far as we know, he never messed around with drugs.

His parents are inconsolable. They feel that it is their fault for not recognizing signs that their son was deeply troubled.

Why would a seemingly happy, well-adjusted, attractive boy with his whole life ahead do such a thing? He left no notes, not a clue. He picked a time when he was alone at home. When his parents returned from an evening out, they found him dead, with a bullet through his head.

Can anything be done to prevent such tragedies?

— Searching For Answers

Dear Searching: Suicide is second only to accidents as the cause of death among teenagers. The indiscriminate use of drugs is one of the major reasons, but you say this young man was not a user.

Something was wrong in the boy's life. Outward appearances of cheerfulness can be deceiving. Unhappy, frustrated and depressed people often learn to mask their feelings well. The boy you write about was one who did.

There always are signals. Parents, teachers and close friends should be alert to them. Any mention of suicide or verbalized doubts as to whether life is worth living should not be ignored. An attempt to "put things in order" is another flag. Signs of depression in normally cheerful people are another indication of trouble.

Experts on suicide disagree on whether it is preventable. Some wise heads say certain people are programmed at an early age to self-de-

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struct and nothing can stop them — no amount of love, emotional support or caring. I never fail to point this out to parents who view the suicide of their child as a personal failure. Their guilt must be unbearable and it helps to know it wasn't their fault.

Dear Ann Landers: When I first read about transvestites in your column (10 years ago) I thought those guys had to be crazy. I was also sure I'd be able to spot one a mile away.

A few months ago I went to work for an ambulance service. Since that time I have pulled two very macho guys out of wrecked cars. Both were wearing ladies' underwear. Another surprise — a prominent lawyer had a heart attack. When we arrived he was trying to get out of his satin and lace nightie. It's like you said, Ann, you never know.

— Pop-Eyed In Jacksonville

Dear Pop: Thanks for the validation.

Dear Ann: Please print something I read in my Al-Anon book tonight. I think it's beautiful.

— Positive Thinker In Lancaster

Dear Lan: So do I. Here it is:

Today is mine. It is unique. Nobody in the world has one exactly like it. It holds the sum of all my past experiences and all my future potential. I can fill it with joyous memories or ruin it with fruitless worry. If painful recollections of the past come into my mind, or frightening thoughts of the future, I can put them away. They cannot spoil today for me. It is mine.