

THE STRAITS TIMES

More can be done to bring down teen suicide rates

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I am saddened to read about the rise in teenage suicides ("Teen suicides 'highest in 15 years but overall rate falls"; Tuesday).

When a young person commits suicide, it leaves parents and friends shocked, saddened and wondering if they could have done more to prevent it.

Individuals who have a history of depression are more likely to attempt suicide. The increased use of social media among children and teens can also lead to more social pressure through cyber bullying.

Parents should be aware of their child's social media presence and be part of his or her circle of friends on social media platforms, to monitor any troubling comments.

In a country like Singapore, which has no natural resources, our children remain our most precious hope for the future.

In pushing them to succeed, let us be mindful of their mental health and be aware of changes in their behavioural patterns.

I am happy to note that there are several avenues from which to seek help and that there is a great deal of assistance available through schools and other organisations. However, more can be done.

Many young people find it difficult to talk about their struggles and to express the pain they are feeling inside. They tend to hide their pain behind a facade, not knowing where or who they can approach for help, or how.

Some may try to cope on their own in ways that can be harmful to themselves.

Teenagers may feel so overwhelmed by strong negative emotions, and feelings of hopelessness and helplessness, that they cannot see the bigger picture and are unable to think rationally.

I believe the biggest area that requires assistance is family relationship issues.

Studies-related stress is also a common problem. Children have been facing increasing levels of stress over the years. They have to juggle schoolwork, tuition and loads of other co-curricular activities, and are further burdened by peer competition, as well as greater and sometimes unrealistic expectations from parents.

The Government should set up a high-level think-tank to go deeper into the issues concerning this group of vulnerable young people and assist them, together with other organisations and self-help groups.

We must look into ways that can bring down local suicide rates and improve intervention work.

It is also important that society removes the stigma around suicide, especially the assumption that the act is "selfish" or "attention-seeking".

V. Balu

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