



Students and parents consider the trials caused by suicidal thoughts and give advice on how best to support those struggling with mental illness.

Written by Ashley Adams, Anna Bailey and Quinn Brown, Photos by Bailey Thompson, Design by Sabrina San Agustin

Editors note: This story mentions depictions of self harm, depression and attempted suicide.

When junior Charlotte Holland was nine years old, she attempted suicide for the first time.

"My thoughts were that I just didn't want to be here anymore," Holland said. "I was in the mindset where everything sucks. I didn't want to do anything; everything was way too much. It all gathered up I didn't want to feel my emotions, and when depression happened, it all hit at once."

Holland said it took a while for her to reach out for help.

"I had a lot of suicide attempts when I was 9 to 12. When I was 13, I started to reach out for help from my siblings," Holland said. "I wrote many [suicide] notes in my journal when

I was younger. [They were] for my family."

Holland's mom, Kim Holland, said it can be scary to watch your child go through depression and experience suicidal thoughts.

"Some days there are a lot of struggles. It's kind of like driving in the dark sometimes; you don't know where it's going, and you just pray you're on the road," Kim said.

Holland said the most effective coping method for dealing with her suicidal thoughts is introducing distractions.

"[My suicidal thoughts] happen all the time unless I'm extremely distracted. They're pretty persistent, not right now, but I have dealt with them being 24/7 [when] there was no distraction," Holland said.

Mental illness is a common struggle, Kim said, and more people are spreading awareness as more people speak up.

"There has been more awareness

about mental health because people from every walk of life are coming forward and saying it's so much more common than people think it is," Kim said.

Senior and co-chair of the Mental Health Board Lauren Martin said people need to realize having a mental illness is just like having any other injury.

"[It's] just like when you break a bone, or when you get a common cold, people don't freak out or make excuses for your cold; they just get you treatment. And I think that's what mental health needs to be," Martin said.

Martin has struggled with her mental health since she was 13. She said she joined the Mental Health Board as a way to share the importance of mental health.

"[The board provides] a safe place for students to talk about their mental health and find others who might be going through the same thing," Martin said.

Martin's mom, Jennifer Martin, said her advice for those struggling with mental health is to reach out for help.

"I think counseling is always good, finding out what are the triggers, making sure you avoid those types of situations and just keeping calm," she said.

Society does not want to admit that mental illness is as important as physical illness because it makes people uncomfortable, according to Martin. She said it is still important to treat it as a physical illness.

"I think the best way to protect our peers from being engulfed in their mental illness is really just realizing that it's an illness, and the only way to deal with it is either, go into therapy, or get actual physical medicine," Martin said.

Senior Ollie Watson said he has struggled with mental illness since sixth grade. Turning to peers and trusted people in his life, he said, has helped him along the way.

"Healing is never linear; the battle is definitely uphill. But, my therapist helped me understand that's ok," Watson said.

His therapist, Watson said, is one person who makes him feel understood. He said his parents were not completely understanding of his



Junior Charlotte Holland has faced suicidal thoughts since she was nine years old and said that distractions are what have been able to help her get through it. "[Social media] is more of an outlet and using dark humor to cope," she said. (Photo by Bailey Thompson)

mental illness at first.

Growing up in different generations, Watson said, creates a misunderstanding in life experience, making it hard for parents to see the validity of what their child is struggling with.

"My parents try when they can, but they haven't been the best," Watson said.

Watson shared that at first, his parents were not the most understanding in his struggle with depression, but they have learned a lot along the way.

Watson's mom, Reneé Watson, said even when hard days come along, it is vital to remember they are only temporary.

"Depression and suicidal thoughts are not short-term problems. One thing to remember is that there are going to be good days and bad days. But, you just need to focus on the progress you have made, and don't let the setbacks cause you to give up," Reneé said.

Watson said there are many small things friends can do to help one another if parents are not a safe route.

"When people help me take everything day by day, it honestly really helps and lets me know they're there for me," Watson said. "I understand it's not my friend's job to help me get better, but small things like that honestly help a lot."

Encouraging words from peers can help calm a whirring mind, Watson said.

"Hearing that I'm not alone, and having help tak[ing] things day by day, helps me a lot more than just telling me that I have a long life to live or that it gets better," Watson said.

Kim said that it is crucial to take into account other people's feelings around you.

"You never know when someone says they're good, if they're really good or not. [You should] be more

aware of other people and their feelings," Kim said.

Both Watson and Holland said providing distractions for your friends can help them avoid racing

thoughts, an overwhelming feeling that often comes with anxiety.

Holland said although it can be challenging, people need to reach out for help.

"Depression is a hard thing to face alone, so if you're feeling suicidal, I know you can't just get out of that mindset right away. Just try to find someone who can help you," Holland said.

If someone tells you they are suicidal, it is

important to first talk to that person and find out if they are planning anything, and then go get an adult, Martin said.

"[First] ask if they can talk. Try to get them on the phone, try to get them on FaceTime, try to get them preoccupied, so they are not able to go through [with] whatever they're planning on doing," Martin said. "[Then] get an adult involved as soon as possible."

School social worker Anyssa Wells said the best thing a student could do to help support another student who struggles with suicide is to encourage them to contact an adult or another resource who can help.

"I think it's really hard to work through [mental illness] when you're struggling. It's hard to do that alone. I think the biggest thing is to show them support and care by telling them, 'I think it's really important that we go talk to an adult because we can't do things on our own,'" Wells said.

Wells also said people must understand that their mental illness does not make them any less of a person.

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- CHARLOTTE HOLLAND



Senior Lauren Martin is co-chair of the BVNW Mental Health board. "I think it's very important to realize mental health is something anyone can be struggling with," Martin said. Watson and Holland agreed that reaching out to a friend can help. (Photo Illustration by Bailey Thompson)

"[Struggling with] mental health is something that doesn't mean you're bad or any less than; I think mental health is important because there are moments in your life where there's gonna be a struggle, but it's important to find ways to work through it and find help," Wells said.

Wells also said it is crucial for people to understand the importance of mental health especially since the start of Covid-19.

"I think it's important now more than ever to spread awareness of mental health because it is so prevalent, and everyone experiences a little bit of struggle, a little bit of sadness, a little bit of anxiety, especially [because of] the changes that have happened in the last 18 months," Wells said.

In addition to Wells, health teacher and adviser for the BVNW Mental Health Board Molly Haggerty said there are signs people can look for if they believe someone could be suicidal.

"Some of the warning signs might be withdrawing from activities, not hanging out with friends anymore, sleeping too much, not sleeping, eating too much, not having any appetite or general sadness," Haggerty said. "A lot of times people forget it can also come out as anger because they're not quite sure why they're feeling that way, [so] they could lash out at people."

Haggerty said substance abuse can also be a precursor to suicide.

"Sometimes it could be students who are not just recreationally drinking, but abusing substances [and] getting to the point where they're regularly passing out or blacking out," Haggerty said.

Haggerty also said self-harm techniques, such as cutting oneself, can be another warning sign.

Watson said it is important to discuss the importance of mental health when warning signs are present, and that people should check in with their friends regularly.

"People shouldn't be scared of asking their friends if they're suicidal or even just hurting," Watson said.

Reneé said that, as a mom, she agrees that kids need a support system.

"With help, there's hope at the end," Reneé said.



Senior Ollie Watson has struggled with mental illness since he was in sixth grade, and he said being able to turn to his friends has really helped him. "It was uncomfortable at first, but opening up about it really helped me get better. The more I open up, the more honest I can be with myself, the more I can get better," he said. (Photo by Bailey Thompson)

In 2019,

18.8%

of high school students
seriously considered attempting suicide

Of those,

8.9% attempted
suicide

According to the Unified Health Foundation

Suicide is the

#2

cause of death
for ages 15-34



According to the Centers for Disease
Control and Prevention

In the U.S.

3,703

kids from grades 9-12

attempt suicide each day

According to The Jason Foundation, Inc.

