

**TUESDAY**

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## New program takes aim at growing teen suicide rate

 By Elisabeth Nardi  
 The Salt Lake Tribune

For Utah Attorney General Mark Shurtleff, raising awareness about teenage suicide is a personal quest.

Shurtleff said his daughter has struggled with depression, and he choked back tears Monday in announcing a new school-based program that will help spread awareness about teen suicide and hopefully reduce its occurrence.

Shurtleff and Utah first lady Mary Kaye Huntsman said teen suicide is a subject that is often ignored until it's too late. Family members of suicide victims then are left questioning why they didn't detect signs earlier, he said.

"Young people are getting to the point in their lives that is so hopeless, so sad and so alone that they end up taking their own lives," he said. "We still have a major problem here that not many people are talking about."

Utah has among the highest rates of suicide in the nation, with an average of six suicides per week, according to the Suicide Prevention Resource Center.

To try to prevent suicide and get children the help they need, Shurtleff and others are supporting Tennessee-based The Jason Foundation in coming to Utah.

The foundation's curriculum will provide suicide prevention training to Utah teens, parents and educators for free. Teaching materials include computer programs and training for teachers and peer support awareness training.

Called Promise for Tomorrow, the curriculum is not meant to show students and teachers how to counsel suicidal teens. Instead, it provides information and resources so educators and peers recognize warning signs and know who to contact to help troubled teens, said Clark Flatt, foundation president.

The foundation also plans to offer prevention seminars and a Community Assistance Resource Line has been set up in Utah that people can call if they need help identifying suicidal behavior or finding local resources.

At Monday's press conference, Flatt talked about his son Jason, who killed himself in 1997. After his son died, Flatt said it angered him to learn suicide is the third-leading cause of death for people ages 15-24 nationwide.

"We do nothing, not because we are bad parents but because we don't know what to do," he said.

Sherri Wittwer, executive director of the Utah chapter of the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI) said Utah currently has a program called Hope For Tomorrow, which educates people about mental illness and suicide prevention. The program is working because more kids are talking to their parents, which is the goal, Wittwer said Monday.

Shurtleff made it clear the new effort is in no way trying to "step on the toes" of other



Utah first lady Mary Kaye Huntsman listens as Utah Attorney General Mark Shurtleff talks about teen suicide prevention Monday. (Steve Griffin/The Salt Lake Tribune )


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programs in the state. Rather, the foundation will work with the other entities to curb teenage suicide.

The Utah Department of Health, Utah Board of Education and the Utah Parent Teacher Association have agreed to use the suicide prevention program.

Suicide warning signs

- I Depression
  - I Abrupt changes in behavior
  - I Mood swings
  - I Crying spells
  - I Recent grief or loss
  - I Changes in school performance
  - I Giving away treasured belongings
  - I Suicidal threats
  - I Hopelessness
- To get help, call 1-877-778-CARL

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