

# NEVER FORGET

## Suicide victim's mother initiates awareness week

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staff writer

The unspeakable taboo of suicide tends to be overlooked. M.A. Herrera has made it a goal, because of the loss of her own child, to develop a Mental Health Awareness Week for grades seven through twelve.

"Perhaps if each year kids hear that it's ok to talk to someone [about how they are feeling], and they are at a point [when they think] suicide is an option, they will have the tools to know what to do," Herrera said.

Herrera has also introduced this proposal to the leaders of Cy Fair I.S.D. and a former Miss America runner up, who now lives in Houston and speaks nationwide about suicide prevention for the youth of today.

"I have provided the school district with many tools to use [in order] to get the message of awareness out to our kids," Herrera said.

Suicide rates for 10 to 14 year-olds have increased fifty-one percent between the years 1981-2004. It is the third leading cause of death in the U.S. and it is preventable.

"As parents, it is hard to know what typical teenager behavior is and what is unusual, but I say go with your gut instinct. Friends know a lot more about kids than parents, so take what your friends say very seriously. And if they are talking about suicide, you must tell an adult. Never take it as a joke or a threat," Herrera said.

With Herrera's former experience, she feels what her son did was wrong, but she is not embarrassed over the situation.

"I know without a doubt Bryce is in heaven with Jesus sliding down rainbows

and having a ball. No one likes to talk about it, but our kids are dying and we need to educate others. His life can still make a difference if we don't ignore what happened," she said.

Herrera's experience with her own child led her to create a goal of establishing a Mental Health Awareness Week. Through out the week, students would have the opportunity to discuss cutting, depression, anxiety, divorce, eating disorders, stress and suicide. She has been determined to make a difference in teenage lives, since the death of her son last year.

"[Suicide] is a permanent solution to a temporary issue," Herrera said.

Friday, September 28, 2007 marked the one year anniversary of Bryce Herrera's death. In honor of his memory, his mother held a memorial party at her house on September 26, 2007.

"We gathered together to remember all the good times and good things my blessing did in his short but wonderful life. There was pizza, Kit Kats, and Hot Cheetos. I ordered these cool pins with his photo on it, and we also did a balloon release," Herrera said.

M.A. Herrera is a woman on a mission to prove that suicide is not the answer. To aid the cause, she has also appeared on a local ABC newscast to spread the word about how to prevent teen suicide. She makes it clear that students should not be afraid to talk to someone. Talking to that person could save their life, and save them from going through what she has experienced.

"Bryce as wonderful and handsome as he was made a wrong, impulsive, poor choice. Many people are hurt and confused over what he did. It was not the answer," Herrera said.



**Helping Others** - M.A. Herrera created Mental Health Awareness Week to help educate parents and students after her son, above, committed suicide in September of 2006 at the age of 14. "Suicide is silent but the cry for help is not. No one likes to talk about it because it's the unspeakable taboo but our kids are dying and we need to educate others to stop it," Herrera said.

photo by Beth Pierce

## Warning Signs of Suicide

- **Change in Sleep Patterns** - insomnia, oversleeping, nightmares.
- **Change in Eating Habits** - loss or gain of appetite and weight, overeating.
- **Low Self-esteem** - feeling worthless, shame, overwhelming guilt, self hatred.
- **Loss of Hope** - believing nothing will ever get better and nothing will change.
- **Recent Loss** - can be through death, divorce separation, broken relationship, self-confidence, self-esteem.
- **Talking About Death** - any mention of dying, disappearing, jumping, shooting oneself, or other types of self harm.
- **Change in Personality** - sad, withdrawn, irritable, anxious, tired.
- **Change in Behavior** - cannot concentrate on school, work or routine tasks.

## What's Inside

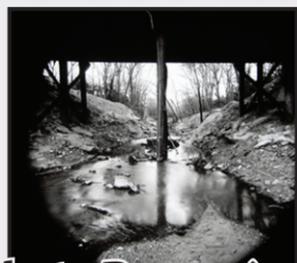


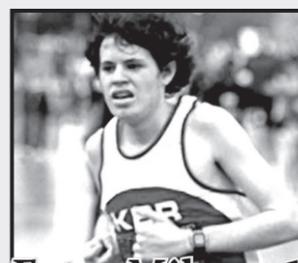
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