

Caring and Helping

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I once had an assignment in which we had to introduce a song that had a deep meaning for our lives and explain why. For most of us, this assignment was about introducing our favorite song and we enjoyed lighthearted discussions about our songs leading up to the presentation, but there was one boy, who was secretive about his work and did not want to discuss anything about it until the actual presentation. The song he chose was 'Yesterday' by Atmosphere. It starts with a man talking about missing someone, maybe his girlfriend, and then he talks about how he regrets not doing something. At the end of the song, there is a big plot twist and the someone turns out to be the man's father who has passed away. When the boy revealed this, the classroom went silent. He said, "I lost my best friend last year, and this song reminds me of him." At that moment, something clicked inside of me. In Japan, suicide is the number one leading cause of death for young persons aged 15-39. Across all age groups, 21,897 people died last year. However, suicide never felt familiar to me. It was always something that happened elsewhere, so I did not give it much thought.

When I was 14, I noticed my best friend was not getting any sleep. I got messages from her at three in the morning on a school night. She was struggling with insomnia. She also had red eyes from crying hard at night. Because my mother was teaching a university course about gender, I learned a lot about LGBT issues, and I guessed that my friend was struggling with something similar. But, it took me a whole year to finally get her to come out to me. I asked her about coming out to other people, and she said no, because she was too afraid that people were going to judge her. Then I realized her insomnia and red eyes were caused by the stress she felt hiding her true self and the fear she felt about being different.

I have a friend who goes to another school who bites his nails constantly, and one day I saw his nails bleeding so I asked him why he did that. I told

him that he should stop, but he said, “Sorry, but this is the only way I deal with depression.” This was the first time I recognized depression. He and I, we both have a learning disorder called dyslexia. Because of dyslexia, learning another language becomes almost impossible. While I was able to cope by taking only English electives at my school, his school required everyone to take Latin. No one helped him while he was drowning in quicksand that he had no way coming out on his own. To give you an image, imagine building a chair and everyone around you seems to know how but you have no idea. That is what it feels like to learn another language with dyslexia. However, people see you as lazy, and no one at school will help you. That is what happened to my friend and what lead him to depression.

Late night messages, red eyes, and nail biting, these are just the few signs I saw around me. Many people are dying inside, even today, but people often ignore these signs, and just categorize them as people who have problems. I was scrolling through my Facebook feed and spotted a post from Lady Gaga dedicating her song to a teen fan called Jamey who committed suicide after being bullied about his sexuality. I looked him online and discovered that earlier, he had written blog posts about being bullied, but people only used it write anonymous, hateful, hostile comments until he took his own life. This is the reality that we live in. This is the truth. We see signs, but we ignore them, until one day it is too late. I am scared that one of my friends could be next.

Preventing suicide is a difficult problem to think about, but I believe we must work on fixing it together. We cannot keep people from hurting themselves unless we show that we care and love them. Without a helping hand, this situation is not going to improve. People care but not enough to actually listen. Well, I say that needs to end. There are so many people around you who are being torn apart, bit by bit. There are SOS signals, but most people do not care enough to catch these signs. We humans cannot live alone; we give help, and we get helped. That is how we survive. Hillary Clinton once said, “Caring for others is an expression of what it means to be fully human.” Keep your eyes open, talk to people, and care for others in order to bring about happiness.