

More boys are talking about mental health thanks to raised awareness

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GRAND JUNCTION, Colo. (KKCO/KJCT)-- September is National Suicide Prevention month. Statistically girls have always gone to the school counselor to talk about their feelings, but now that's changing thanks to some extra classes.



According to District 51 the mental health stigma is going down and the ratio between girls and boys talking with the counselor has become about 50/50.

"One in five youth are living with a mental health condition," said Genevieve Morris, Suicide Prevention Specialist for School District 51.

Some argue it can be more difficult for boys to open up and talk with a school counselor, but the district says that's changing thanks to raised awareness of Mental Health in their schools.

"The leading cause for death for kids in the state of Colorado is suicide and that's above the national average," said Kati Garner, Mental Health and Crisis Coordinator for School District 51.

District 51 made it board policy last year to have suicide prevention presentations for all 6th to 12th graders.

"It's really about mental health awareness and especially what to watch out for if somebody is thinking about suicide and what to do if we are worried about a friend," said Morris.

Safe 2 Tell Colorado lets anyone report an issue anonymously. They received more than 16,000 reports last school year. That number is up by 74% compared to the previous year. Most of those calls were for suicide threats.

"I have been diagnosed with bi-polar two, I also have substance abuse, and eating disorder diagnosis in my past, and so I talk about those things with the student's so that they can understand because all that stuff for me started in high school and middle school and I don't think it's ever too early to start talking about these things," said Kathryn Bennett, volunteer for NAMI.

Kathryn Bennett volunteers for the National Alliance on mental illness, also known as NAMI. She shares her experiences with the students.

"If somebody were to come to me when I was in early high school and said hey what your feeling isn't abnormal and there's some way for you to get some help then maybe I wouldn't have had the same experiences and maybe my life would have been a little bit easier," said Bennett.

She says it's important to know the warning signs like not eating, sleeping too much, or self-harm.

"It's important for us to talk about things like suicide and uncomfortable things like mental health and mental wellness so that kids know they can get help and know that most importantly know that they are not alone," said Bennett.

School District 51 offers local counseling services, support groups, and partners with hospitals to get kids the help they need, most of the time free of charge.

They say St. Mary's offers free youth mental health classes for the public for more info click on the link to the right of this article. <https://mindspringshealth.org/mental-health-first-aid/>