



## Adults Need to be Role Models in Helping Children Develop Mental Resilience

Posted on October 10, 2018 by Shawnta S. Barnes

October 10, 2018 marks the 26th anniversary of World Mental Health Day. Honestly, I'm a mess right now. Hours before I wrote this piece I found out my great uncle had passed away. I was just at his 89th birthday party on Saturday and I had planned to spend time with him next week. I can't focus and I feel incredibly sad. Although he was my great uncle, he treated me like a granddaughter. At his birthday party, people kept saying I was his favorite great niece. I don't know if that was true, but we were close. We had so much in common like being urban gardeners; we shared a passion for growing our



*Shawnta Barnes with her Great Uncle Lindbergh Guyse*

own food. Right now, I am struggling to complete the simplest task. It took me hours to finish this article because I kept crying. I'm an adult. How do we expect children to function when life pulls the rug from under them when adults many times don't do much better in similar situations?

That's why I'm glad that the theme for World Mental Health Day this year is, "Young People and Mental Health in a Changing World." As much as some situations in life stay the same, such as the death of a loved one, many situations have evolved for youth today or didn't even exist years ago. There are situations youth face today that their parents did not face when they were children. When I was a child I did not have access to my peers after school through social media. I didn't worry about how many likes, shares, follows, or retweets I had. I sure didn't have to deal with cyberbullying.

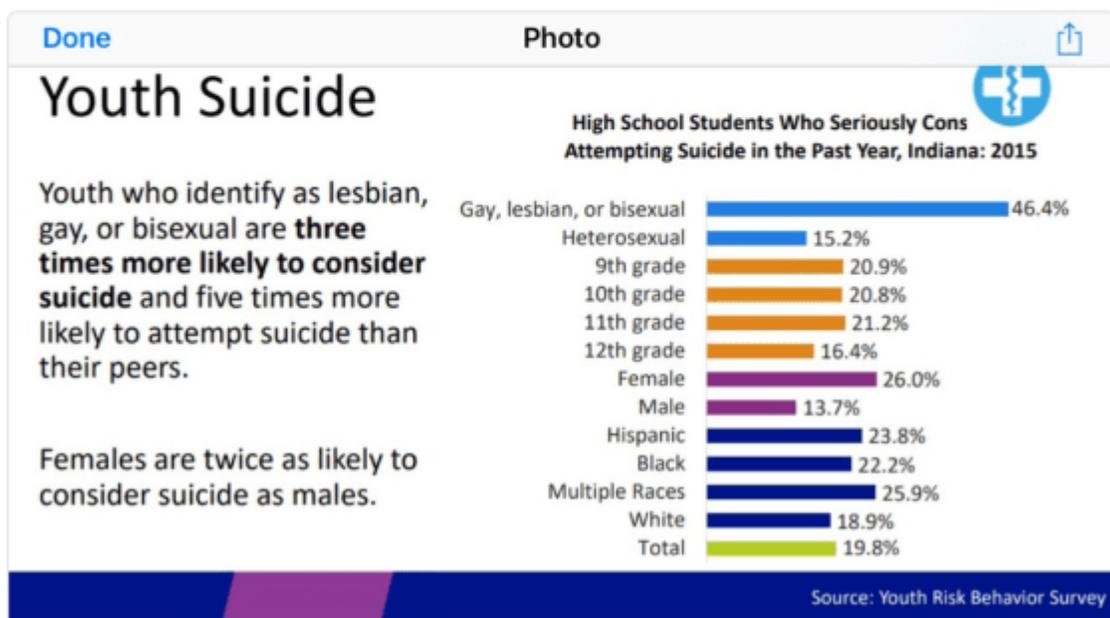
On September 7, 2018, during Suicide Prevention Month, Indiana Superintendent of Public Instruction Dr. Jennifer McCormick shared a graphic about suicide rates in Indiana. As a parent in this state, I found the data extremely concerning.



**Jennifer McCormick** @suptdrmccormick · Sep 7

ALL students deserve to be safe, affirmed, included, & heard. Take pause to review the IN data. @EducateIN, schs, & partnering agencies are working hard to address this issue.

Sept. is Suicide Prevention Month. What will be your contribution towards prevention efforts?



Almost 20% of Indiana high school students considered suicide last year. The weight of living was so heavy, they seriously thought the best course of action was not to live anymore. Knowing this information makes me sick to my stomach. It saddens me that young people who have so much more to experience in life came to the conclusion that life might be too much.

One aspect World Mental Health Day highlights this year is the need for developing mental resiliency in our youth:

*There is a growing recognition of the importance of helping young people build mental resilience, from the earliest ages, in order to cope with the challenges of today's world. Evidence is growing that promoting and protecting adolescent health brings benefits not just to adolescents' health, both in the short- and the long-term, but also to economies and society, with healthy young adults able to make greater contributions to the workforce, their families and communities and society as a whole.*

Gone are the days when we tell children to toughen up and shake it off. We have to do more. Adults have to be vulnerable and transparent and show children how to process and move forward. I was having a great day before I wrote this article. I'm a library/media specialist and it was parent/teacher conferences. I was running the book fair during that time. I had no clue that when I pulled into my garage and turned off my SUV that I would find out my great uncle, whom I saw days ago, was gone. I stood in the garage trying to get myself together, but I kept crying. Finally, with tears in my eyes, I walked inside my house and told my family what happened. I sat my boys down and said, "I'm really sad right now. I'm not ready to hear this news. I might be sad tomorrow or the day after that, but it is okay to be sad when someone we love dies."

Death, just like so many other parts of life will be unknown to our children until their first experience. We must be there to support young people and help them work through situations such as when another child doesn't want to be their friend, a kid is harassing them at school, their crush rejects them, they fail at a task, etc. If we don't start helping our children, they are going to move from seriously contemplating suicide to completing suicide or they will grow up to be adults who can't function or bounce back from life trials. Since we know our children are the future, we need to make sure they have mental resiliency.