

Conscious decisions: Don't stop listening and communicating



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As I write this report, myself and my community is heartbroken for the third time in three years. We have lost three tribal youth to tragedy.

This is not the sort of thing these kids should be dealing with at this age. They should be able to enjoy their friends, play the sports they love, participate in band, clubs and plan their future.

Two of the youth should have walked with the rest of their class for graduation this past May but had faced personal issues and took their own lives. Nobody will know how these two were hurting and why they thought there was no hope or way out. The families, friends and community are left to wonder why and how this could have happened.

This past Friday night, a senior had left the homecoming dance on his way home driving a car and was hit head on by a truck. The driver crossed the centerline and was driving under the influence. The student died on impact and the driver was taken to jail. I am told the scene was horrific and even the first responders had a hard time.

Word spread quickly in our small knit community and hearts were aching for the families.

The kids built a memorial wall, the football team gathered to support each other and the community held a vigil on Sunday evening at the football field. This is the first time in my life

I attended a vigil. The bleachers were packed with hundreds of youth and adults. A cousin of the student talked about the loss to the family and the ray of sunshine he was. The football coach talked about the player and what a kind, loving student he was. His girlfriend and best friend presented flags with both his basketball and football numbers to his parents. His parents were both wearing his jerseys. The crowd released black and gold balloons and lit candles as prayers were offered. Many moved to the field to offer condolences to the family, while the community hugged and cried with each other.

The reason I decided to write about this is because all these tragedies could have been prevented.

Sometimes it is not easy to prevent suicide, but maybe if we educate and listen we could make a difference. Every day in school,



sports or other programs kids are bullied. Kids can be very mean.

Adults need to be their first role models on how to treat people. Many kids hear or see how adults behave and model that behavior or share that opinion.

We need to teach these kids to stand up for one another instead of against each other. Sometimes we blame things on the schools

but we need to teach at home too. I think it is a community effort to stop the bullying that could lead to suicide.

We also need to listen to each other and the kids. With all this technology it is more distracting to have someone's undivided attention. I am guilty of it myself. We try sometimes to multi-task and instead we end up not hearing our loved ones with things that really could be clues to things affecting their lives or hurting them in some way. We need to take time out and listen when they talk to us and ask our kids how their day was.

If we notice changes in behavior or mood of our kids or their friends we need to ask others if they have noticed anything. Talk to school counselors or even bring your son or daughter to a behavioral health professional.

Help is out there we just need to recognize the need and take action.

I am not saying that people always see this behavior because sometimes people suffer alone, but if we do notice it to quickly try and get them help.

We have all done stupid things while operating a vehicle — speeding, running a red light, talking, texting or playing with our phones, playing with the radio, turning around to yell at our kid in the back seat, drop something and try and pick it up while driving and driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

In this case, it can be very easy to blame or even hate the driver for driving under the influence. The sad reality is that we all do many of these stupid things while driving that can have a similar effect. We all have choices when we get behind the wheel and that is a great responsibility. It is not just about getting a ticket or getting our license suspended, it could result in a life change for anyone involved.

In 1990, my family had almost lost my aunt and her husband to a drunk driver. I was a senior in high school and my grandpa had just passed. My aunt was pre-

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IMPORTANT NUMBERS

Emergency	911
Poison Control Center	800.222.1222

Family Services	
ACFS- Sault Ste. Marie	906.632.5250
ACFS- Kincheleo	906.495.1232
ACFS- Manistique	906.341.6993

Health & Well Being	
National Domestic Violence Hotline	800.799.7233
AA Info Line	906.253.9364
Veterans Crisis Line	800.273.8255
Suicide Prevention Line	800.273.8255
Michigan Child Abuse/Neglect Reporting	855.444.3911
Sault Tribe Advocacy Resource Center	877.639.7820

Health Centers	
Escanaba	906.786.2636
Marquette	906-225-1616
Hessel	906-484-2727
Sault Ste. Marie	906.632.5200
St. Ignace	906.643.8689
Manistique	906.341.8469
Newberry	906.293.8181
Munising	906.387.4614
Hiawatha Behavioral Health Crisis Services	800.839.9443
Sault Tribe Behavioral Health	906.635.6075

Sault Tribe Law Enforcement (non-emergency)	
Sault Ste. Marie	906.635.6065
St. Ignace	906.643.7210
Manistique	906.341.8317

paring for last minute Christmas shopping for her kids before she came north for the funeral. She was driving when the other vehicle crossed the centerline. She had very serious injuries which included bleeding internally.

Her kids had to spend the holidays with other family members as she endured other surgeries and a month-long hospital stay. She also could not attend her dad's funeral. That was my family's emotional experience with that driver's choice.

My purpose is not to lecture anyone or place judgment, but rather for us all to be conscious of the decisions we make and how they may affect the lives of

our family and the lives and families of those involved.

May we all listen and cherish each other. May we stop bullying and stand up for each other. May we call for a ride or have a designated driver. May we drive undistracted. May we call for help or seek assistance when those cannot do it for themselves. May we spend quality time with our family and loved ones.

I am so thankful to live in this community and the support we provide to one another! The support will get us through these difficult times until we all meet again!

God bless the families of Andy, Ben and Mitchell!