

From the Office of the Sheriff:

As individuals and families struggle during tough times we see our suicide calls increase. These calls have no specific age group; they start with teenagers and go up through the elderly. What we have seen is a drastic increase in these types of calls. In 2004 we received 86 suicide calls, in '05 - 73, in '06 - 115, in '07 - 154, and well over 200 suicide calls in 2008.

Some calls are simply a person leaving a residence and telling another they are going to kill themselves but do not, nor plan to. Others include overdose of medication or acts of self mutilation. Often these threats or attempts are stopped and could be classified as a "call for help". The 911 call is often made by the victim as a means to getting the help they desperately need and want. The remaining balance includes successful suicides.

We take each call very seriously, squads respond and a full investigation is conducted. If the victim was not successful a decision is made as to what to do with the person. If seriously injured in an attempt, most likely they are admitted into a hospital. Should they need only minor medical attention, they receive it and are transported by law enforcement to either Mendota Mental Health or Winnebago Mental Health Institutions for a 72-hr hold/evaluation.

This process is called an Emergency Detention (ED) and is coordinated by the deputy through Dodge County Human Services. Those that need inpatient care for injuries can be held on an ED after being released from the hospital. We can also ED people for stating they are going to kill themselves, regardless if there has been an attempt or not. Each threat's credibility is assessed and the deputy makes a decision as to whether or not protective placement is necessary. The 72-hr hold begins upon arrival and the facility. Within that time the person is evaluated by a doctor. The person is then brought to the courts and after testimony the judge must decide as to whether or not the person needs additional in-patient care or can be released to friends or family. These cases require many man-hours as we are the primary agency for the transport of these individuals back and forth to court.

Sad to say, many of our suicide calls are for those who were successful in taking their own life. Each of these calls generates a full response and a death investigation. We work very closely with the Dodge County Medical Examiners Office to determine cause of death and confirm absence of foul play. This takes time and man-hours, but resources well spent. In most cases an autopsy is conducted. We also make the necessary death notifications and spend time with the family. Often a note is left, or the family can describe signs of depression but never would have thought the person would actually take their life. It is natural for many to feel guilty for preventing the act, but seldom could it have been prevented. If the person was determined to take their life, nothing anybody could have done will stop a very determined person.

The number of successful suicides is growing 3-fold. There are from every generation, every background, every economic scale, each case is different. We will ensure a thorough investigation to determine cause of death and absence of foul play. Talk to your family and friends, if the signs are there make the call for help. Don't assume a loved one "doesn't have it in them" to take their life. Dodge County has resources to help people get through any situation. Thanks for listening, tnehs@co.dodge.wi.us.