

Lee College hosts Mental Health and Suicide Awareness Week

Free events & activities include improv show, resource fair with local health organizations

BAYTOWN, TX — Statistics show that suicide is the second-leading cause of death among college students, yet many don't know about mental health and are unable to recognize the signs of anxiety, depression, eating disorders, and other mental illnesses.

The first-ever Mental Health and Suicide Awareness Week at Lee College is an effort to change that through events and activities that explore the symptoms, risk factors and treatments for mental illnesses; break down stigmas and misconceptions; and connect participants to available and affordable local resources. All events are free and open to the public.

"We want people to talk about mental illness as freely as they would talk about a broken bone or another physical health concern," said Anajery Valadez, an academic advisor in the Lee College Counseling Center and co-organizer for the week.

"As children we are taught to take care of ourselves physically — wear a helmet if you ride a bike, brush your teeth, put a band aid on a cut — but we were not educated on how to heal our emotional wounds or how to care for ourselves psychologically," she said. "We can only change that by reducing the stigma and educating the community about mental illness."

Highlights of Mental Health and Suicide Awareness Week include:

Tuesday, Oct. 3

Mental Health and Suicide Improv Show and Discussion — 6 p.m., Student Center

Houston improv teams will use laughter and humor to help break down the barriers that stop people from talking about mental health and suicide. A discussion will follow the show. Pizza and refreshments will be served.

Wednesday, Oct. 4

Mental Health and Suicide Resource Fair – 10 a.m.-noon, Patio & Gazebo

Several local organizations that advocate for mental health and those living with a mental illness will be part of the fair, which will highlight low-cost mental health services available in the community. Student clubs and organizations will also be on hand to provide information about on-campus resources and ways to stay mentally and physically healthy.

Training/Workshop: Ask About Suicide to Save a Life – 11 a.m., Bayer Conference Center

The Harris Center for Mental Health and IDD will provide an overview of suicide and suicidal behavior, including risk and protective factors. Participants will be trained to gather more information about a person at risk of suicide and take action. Pizza and refreshments will be served.

Presentation: In Our Own Voice — 12:30 p.m., Bayer Conference Center

Presenters from the National Alliance of Mental Illness Houston will give personal accounts of living with mental illness — from their initial diagnosis and darkest days, to receiving treatment and developing coping skills and future goals — and share what long-term recovery looks like. Pizza and refreshments will be served.

Presentation: Depression and Bipolar Disorders — 2 p.m., Bayer Conference Center

The Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance of Houston will talk about depression and bipolar disorders, confronting social stigma and advocating for the rights of people living with mental disorders. Presenters will also share information about free and local support groups that help individuals, family members and friends understand these difficult yet treatable mental disorders. Pizza and refreshments will be served.

Thursday, Oct. 5

It's Real: College Students and Mental Health Documentary and Discussion — 1 p.m., Bayer Conference Center

This documentary encourages students to be mindful of the state of their mental health, recognize when they are struggling and take steps to seek health. A group discussion about the film will be held after the screening. Pizza and refreshments will be served.

Workshop: Emotional Hygiene and the College Student — 6 p.m., Bayer Conference Center

In this interactive workshop, participants will discuss ways to cope with daily stressors that can affect mental health and the importance of emotional self-care. Light refreshments will be served.