Suicide is one of the most detrimental, heart-breaking causes of death among teens. With so much life and opportunities awaiting them, those who were close to them are left wondering what went so wrong that they would give up their whole future.

It affects more people than the victim would think. On the last day of eighth grade, I didn’t even believe it the first time I heard it. The boy I had three classes with, who sat right next to me in history, who teasingly called me a nerd, had taken his own life. He wasn’t a close friend. In fact, we hardly knew each other. So why was I sobbing? I couldn’t fathom why a popular athlete in honors classes would even think about taking his life. Didn’t he have everything? I had heard about teens committing suicide, but this was the first time I was personally affected by it.

Approximately 95% of those who commit suicide suffer from some sort of psychological disorder at the time of death. The most prevalent of these disorders are depression and bipolar disorder, which are frequently worsened by drug and alcohol abuse. Studies also show that about 60% of suicides are committed with some sort of firearm. Therefore, the risk of suicide increases when teens have access to guns at home.

Besides the psychological disorders, the teens that often commit suicide are doing it to get back at someone. They think to themselves, “I’ll show them.” To some, it’s the ultimate final revenge on society or anyone who hurt them. When people commit suicide out of spite, all they do is lose everything and hurt those they leave behind.

Something many people don’t realize is that suicide rates between males and females differ. This is because of the methods typically used by each gender. Females typically try to overdose on drugs or cut themselves. Males usually use firearms, hang themselves, or jump from extreme heights. Even though girls contemplate committing
suicide twice as much as boys, the boys have a higher suicide rate because they use more lethal methods, whereas many female attempts fail.

In my opinion, the school system does not do nearly enough to teach how to prevent teen suicide. I never really learned about the causes or signs of teen suicide until this year in my AP Psychology class. Many students may graduate from high school without any knowledge on the subject at all. It may not happen often in Owasso, Oklahoma, but one life should be more than enough to raise awareness. That one life can make all the difference. We shouldn’t have to wait until it becomes a widespread problem to do something about it.

Of course the school encourages students to talk with counselors about their problems, but they might not want to admit they’re contemplating suicide to someone they hardly know. They will be much more likely to talk about their deepest feelings and thoughts with friends their own age. Every year, there is a big assembly at the high school to inform the whole student body about drunk driving. I firmly believe the school should offer something similar for teen suicide prevention. If everyone is educated about the causes and red flags of suicide, students will be able to recognize the warning signs in their friends. Parents should also be included and notified about how they should intervene in the situation. Any approach should be comprehensive.

Many times after someone commits suicide, friends or family members will remember the individual saying or doing something to signify it. Instead of brushing off these warning signs, informed people will be able to take action. If there is still doubt after trying to talk them out of it, parents, a doctor, or counselor should be alerted. There
are also teen crisis hotlines available that are kept confidential. It should be treated as a very sensitive situation and not taken lightly.

Mental health screening is another strategy that helps to catch problems early on before they get worse. These tests are already being implemented in many schools. For instance, the Columbia University’s TeenScreen program has been given in Owasso public schools. If signs of drug abuse or psychological disorders are brought to attention early on, the students can be given the treatment needed so that their problems don’t develop into anything life-threatening. Some say that screening is an invasion of peoples’ privacy, but if someone’s mental health is at risk, it won’t just go away by itself.

One warning sign to look for is the theme of death in artwork, essays, poetry, or music. Individuals considering suicide will often give away possessions that mean a lot to them. If they make statements along the lines of, “People would be better off without me,” they should be taken seriously and talked out of it. Also, running away, unusual neglect of personal appearance, violence, and changes in eating in sleeping habits are important signs to look for.

Overall, I believe that providing suicide education for the student body would be most effective in increasing awareness of warning signs and causes to look for in peers. Teachers can also be helpful, but may feel that it isn’t their place to pry into students’ personal lives. Friends and family are the best tools for stopping suicide attempts. Teens feel much more comfortable telling their friends about their feelings. Through increased awareness, we can help prevent these tragic losses of life and fewer loved ones will be left wondering how they missed the signs that something was seriously wrong.