

One time as I was helping a high school student with her assignment, she suddenly started to cry; I was shocked when she confessed that she is tired of living with her family and had considered committing suicide. After listening to her story, it suddenly reminded me of a similar situation that my friend had been in before.

When I was in fourth grade, my friend was distraught after failing her math exam. She was afraid to go home, so she asked me to meet her on the roof of my apartment building. As we talked about her problem, she became very emotional and started climbing the railing overlooking a nine story drop to the street below. Before she could fall, I quickly climbed onto the railing to pull her back. At the moment, I couldn't understand why she would do that. I thought she was so impulsive and immature, but later I realized what her family life was like. Her mother stayed at home all day playing computer games. Her father always put lots of pressure on her to be perfect. If my friend did not pass her exams, her parents would hit her with a wire hanger. Can you imagine how much that would hurt? Her situation made me realize how problems like this can affect young people.

After my friend's attempted suicide, I began to see similarities between her family life and mine. My father used to hit me on my head when I interrupted him or if I did not do what he said. He would give me extra reading assignment in addition to my school work, and if I didn't finish them, he would not let me sleep. He never really seemed to care about my feelings. When my mother moved to Japan for work and was no longer there to support me, I began to feel like I had no one who really listen to me and care about me. From time to time, I even considered committing suicide to escape from this situation. However, as I grew up and moved to Japan, I realized that life changes, and that situations that seem hopeless do not last forever.

My friend and I are not unique. According to the Centers for Disease Control, in the United States, almost 15 percent of high school students consider suicide at some point, and about 5 percent actually attempt it. Two of the main factors which cause teenagers to think about suicide are being pushed too hard to succeed and feeling that nobody understands or listens to them. Parents are often unaware that their children feel this way and do not recognize signs, such as sudden or extreme changes in mood, both positive and negative. Some children say things like, "I won't be a problem for you much longer", or "I won't see you again." Other children may start arguments or become withdrawn. At school, a sudden drop in grades may also be a warning sign.

Young people who are depressed or are thinking about suicide need to realize

that they are not alone. Don't be afraid to talk to your teachers, friends, and parents if you are feeling like your situation is hopeless. There are also resources within communities and online that offer advice, counseling, and support services. If you are a parent who is worried about a child, ask them about how they feel and show them that you care about them. Encourage them to express their feelings. Showing them that you understand their point of view helps maintain better communication. Take some time to go on little trips with your child and love them for who they are. The best time to build a good relationship is now, because we never know what will happen tomorrow.