

Shirley Weddle is the AFSP North Texas Chapter Research Connection chairperson, a member of the AFSP Survivors of Suicide Support team, co-facilitator for past Survivors of Suicide Loss Support Groups and an ambassador for Brain Health at the UT Dallas Center for Brain Health. Shirley and her husband Brad lost their only child, Matthew, age 22, to suicide 5 years ago in July 2014. Matthew, a Senior Computer Science major with special interests in Neuroscience and Machine Learning/Artificial Intelligence at UT Dallas, was extremely smart and athletic with a big smile and a big dream of making a positive difference in the world. Losing Matthew started Shirley on a journey to answer the questions of “why,” understanding that no one factor causes suicide. Shirley strongly believes that a key to preventing suicide in the future is educating people that “mental health” is “brain health, understanding how our brains develop and how factors such as sleep, diet, exercise, stress, impulsivity and the associated chemicals in our brains affect our actions and reactions. Her dream is that through research and using imaging methods such as functional MRI, we will better understand how to objectively identify brain health issues just like we identify diabetes and other physical conditions and then to treat and monitor improvements based upon that treatment. Research shows that mothers carry the stem cells of their children in their bodies. Therefore, when we mothers act in our child’s name, a part of our child is physically there with us, still making a difference in the world.

The presentation/discussion “Suicide Prevention and Brain Health: Talk Saves Lives” is a combination of education and awareness about suicide prevention and support for those that have lost someone to suicide as well as a discussion of how “mental health is brain health”... how brain development is related to age and how the chemicals in our bodies affect our brain in multiple ways.

Our brain chemistry is affected by things such as diet, exercise, sleep, stress, how our brains process information, use of substances/medication, physical conditions in other parts of the body, especially those resulting in chronic pain, plus genetics among other factors.

We all have brains; therefore we all have mental health. When we approach mental health and suicide prevention from this viewpoint, recognize risk and warning signs and freely “talk” about it, we can better support each other and truly “save lives.”

Website resource: www.afsp.org.

Additional resources will be provided on the day of the presentation/discussion.

If you are in crisis, please call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255) or contact the Crisis Text Line by texting TALK to 741741