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*For Immediate Release*

## **ONE CONVERSATION COUNTS: NAMI OFFERS RESOURCES TO HELP FOR SUICIDE PREVENTION MONTH**

ARLINGTON, Va.—Suicidal thoughts can affect anyone, regardless of age, gender or background and are often the result of mental health conditions. But suicide is preventable. One conversation with a person who cares can make a difference. To honor National Suicide Prevention Awareness Month in September, the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) offers resources that can equip everyone to hold a conversation with a friend or loved one who may be struggling with thoughts of suicide.

"Suicide is the 10<sup>th</sup> leading cause of death in America and the third-leading cause of death for young people 10-24. Though they may occur regularly for some individuals, suicidal thoughts should always be taken seriously," said NAMI National Executive Director Mary Giliberti, J.D. "In many cases, the individuals, friends and families affected by suicide feel shame or stigma that prevents talking openly about the issue. Having one conversation can help someone through a troubling time."

To help erase the stigma around mental illness, NAMI has designed a series of free graphics that can be downloaded and posted to social media throughout the month of September, to help promote awareness of suicide prevention discussions and mental illness. To download the graphics, visit: [www.nami.org/suicideawarenessmonth](http://www.nami.org/suicideawarenessmonth).

Sometimes, the best way to help is just to reach out with kindness. NAMI encourages everyone to remember these tips when having a conversation with a friend or loved one who may be struggling:

- Let them know that they can talk with you about what they are going through.
- Make sure that you are actively and openly listening to the things he or she says.
- Provide positive reinforcement, don't argue with negative statements.
- Be an active listener by reflecting feelings and summarizing thoughts.
- Reassure your friend or loved one that you are concerned for their well-being and encourage them to lean on you for support.

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*Continued from page 1*

Author and speaker Linea Johnson, now 29, has dealt with depression and bouts of suicidal thoughts for years. "I can remember a day when I was 19 years old and feeling extremely suicidal," says Linea. "I had made plans to go through with it that evening and even said my goodbyes to my family, though I didn't tell them what I intended to do. My dad could tell something was up, though, as he drove me home to my apartment," said Johnson.

"My dad started a gentle conversation, told me he loved me, that I could talk to him about anything and that he was always open and available. Then he asked a question I'll always remember: 'Are you safe?' I hesitated – though I didn't quite give my dad a truthful response, that hugely important and startling question kept reverberating after I got home. I decided I didn't want to do anything that would hurt my dad," Linea recalls, noting the impact just one conversation had on her life.

The veteran and serving military community is disproportionately affected by this issue. Rick Kolberg, National Veteran Suicide Prevention Advocate, has experienced this in his role at 22Kill, an organization dedicated to raising awareness around veteran suicide. "I work daily with veterans and serving military members who are dealing with thoughts of suicide. Through that work and my personal journey, I've found that having a conversation with a brother or sister in arms can help recreate that missing sense of 'task and purpose' taken away by feelings of hopelessness," said Kolberg.

"I always guide a peer contemplating suicide to reach out and talk to someone who won't judge them and may even be able to identify. Because we know these conversations work, we've created a buddy system to connect men and women who've served with someone who cares when they need a listening ear."

For more information about how to begin that one conversation and additional resources for National Suicide Prevention Awareness Month and more, visit <https://www.nami.org/suicideawarenessmonth>.

## **SOURCE National Alliance on Mental Illness**

### **About NAMI**

NAMI is the nation's largest grassroots mental health organization dedicated to building better lives for the millions of Americans affected by mental illness.

NAMI Southwestern Pennsylvania, an affiliate of the National Alliance on Mental Illness, is dedicated to improving the lives of individuals and families affected by mental illness through recovery focused support, education and advocacy.

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