

Hello, my name is Meena Allada. I'm 18 years old. I am currently a student-athlete at MidAmerica Nazarene University. I graduated from Shawnee Mission West High. In my time at West, I was involved in many different activities including: band, volleyball, girls soccer, boys soccer, boys basketball and Business Professionals of America. Now at MidAmerica I play soccer and study athletic training. I played for the KC Legends soccer club for 11 years. Throughout my four years at Shawnee Mission West, we lost at least five classmates. Two of those to suicide. I remember hearing about them. The first one was my freshman year. I was in Geometry when I first heard about it, when our principal suddenly announced that a guy named Tom Karlin, a high school senior, had committed suicide the previous weekend. I did not know Tom, since I was only a freshman. But others around me knew him. And at that point in my life I did not know the depth of pain that comes with losing a friend to suicide. So there I sat in class watching my classmates take in the loss of dear a friend. I thought to myself, "I never want to go through something as devastating as this."

Fast forward two years to my junior year. It was a regular Monday morning. I was sitting in my teacher's aid class with nothing to do, so naturally I was

distracted playing games on my phone. I suddenly received a twitter notification saying “Steven and 9 others are talking about RIPCH.” Thinking it was no big deal, I went right back to my game thinking these people had mistyped RIPCW referring to a girl at another school who had committed suicide a few days before. After a few minutes of playing my game I received a message on Facebook from my soccer coaches daughter saying “call me now” with her phone number. I asked my teacher if I could step in the hall and make an important phone call. She allowed me to leave so I could call my friend. I called her expecting to hear something about my coach’s latest injury because he was very injury prone. Instead when she answered the phone I heard, “Meena?! Can you hear me?” I confirmed her question ... The phone was silent for a second and I could faintly hear quiet crying in the background and I called her name trying to figure out what happened. I heard the phone shuffle a little bit more and heard her shaky voice come back and say, “Cady Housh killed herself.” I froze for a second. What? Cady? No way. I just saw her yesterday at our soccer game. Surely she said the wrong name. But she didn’t. I dropped to the floor, my legs unable to function properly. What seemed like an eternity later the teacher next door came into the hall toward my class, but stopped when he saw me

crying and asked if I was alright. I told him no and he rushed into my classroom. Moments later returning with my teacher. She helped me up and I told her I needed to leave, that I couldn't stay at school. She brought me up to the counseling office. I met with one of our counselors (that wasn't mine) and talked with her for a bit. She seemed more concerned about what was being said on social media than my current state of mind. She wouldn't let me leave until my mom called me out but my mom was trying to get out of work so she could come home, so I knew it would be a while before she was able to. Meanwhile, I was stuck talking to a counselor that didn't seem to be genuinely worried about me at all. Finally, my mom's call was processed and I was barely allowed to leave. The counselor told me that my assigned counselor would follow up with me in a few days. I hurriedly rushed to my car and drove home. I was met with close friends and soon after, my mom. Later that day I met with my other teammates. I took a few days off of school and returned Thursday of that same week. my counselor let my teachers know what happened and why I was gone and during that time my high school coach reached out to my mom asking that I visit with her when I get back. Of all the teachers that I had she is the only one that reached out to me or said anything to me about it at all. I had

received no sympathy from my teachers whatsoever and was expected to have all my work done from the days I was gone ready to turn it in.

About a week later I was called to the counseling office and questioned on how I was doing. I told them honestly, how I was doing; at that time it wasn't good. My assigned counselor was also a football coach for the school. He told me how he grieved with the loss of a player earlier that school year. It wasn't much of a conversation about how I was doing mentally.

The year passed and my fellow classmates could tell I wasn't myself. My friends noticed but none of my teachers did. I'll be honest with you, I was suicidal. I had just lost one of my best friends. Coming back from winter break not one teacher checked on me.

I should've been an obvious case and I was overlooked. I believe this act could really make a difference in schools. It starts a trend. If teachers know the signs and aren't afraid to talk to students about their well-being then other students and friends won't be afraid to either. Had a teacher reached out to me or my other friends maybe junior year would've been easier. Or maybe Cady would be here today. I wish this act would've been in place when I was in high school. Not only for my sake but for the sake of

everyone that's had to grieve the loss of someone they care for. My school lost five friends, classmates. Three of them were supposed to walk across the stage with me last May but didn't. It affected the whole school. And that was just at my school. Think of all the other losses around Kansas that affected so many. And suffering the loss of a friend is an obvious case. I'm getting through it, but not everyone is able to say the same thing. Many end up facing these types of situations all on their own. No one should have to face that. Everyone at least needs one person to help them cope. Even if it is only helping a small amount, because every little bit helps.

Thank you.