

Three years ago, while in my classroom, I received a call from a teammate with devastating news. At 8:03 that morning, she informed me that my best friend Cady Housh had killed herself. I dropped to the floor in disbelief unable to hold back my tears.

Due to my shaken and distraught condition from the news of losing my best friend, I was taken to the school counselor. The counselor, at the time, was more interested in the tweets going around about my friend and the suicides, than my current state of mind and how it was affecting me.

My mom called me out and I drove home. The next day my mom and my counselor emailed my teachers to explain what happened and why I wouldn't be in class the next few days. That sounds like an obvious case to me; seeing as it was written out in black and white for my teachers to understand. I was suicidal during that time. I was withdrawn, my usually good grades started to decline, and my attendance was poor. When I attempted to attend school, I was only able to stay a short time. I wasn't getting any better. None of my teachers seemed to notice.

Fast forward to today-only 4 weeks into the new school year-there have been 3 if not more, suicides in Johnson county alone. The Jason Flatt Act is currently in place requiring all teachers to do one hour of online training per year. Now, I'm not here to fight for more time although I think it is obvious that one hour is not enough. Knowing the signs and symptoms of a suicidal teen could be nothing but beneficial. Tennessee was the first state to pass the Jason Flatt Act and saw a 28.3% decrease in suicides every year for the next three years.

Knowing the signs I know now, I would have been able to help Cady. My best friend would be here today. If teachers at her school knew the signs they could've helped her too. She showed almost every sign of being suicidal but no one around her knew them. You see when a student is physically sick it is easy to tell. You can hear them cough or sneeze or hear it in their voice. But when someone is mentally ill, you see it in their actions. You have to learn the signs. Low attendance, low participation, low communication, and reckless behavior. All of these are signs Cady showed before she killed herself.

Suicide is the second leading cause of death in Kansas for kids age 15-24. In 2016, about one person died by suicide each day. This is an epidemic we can do something about, but only if we're all educated to do so.

For all of us kids, still here today, please continue to support mandatory suicide awareness training. It will save lives! It would have saved Cady's.