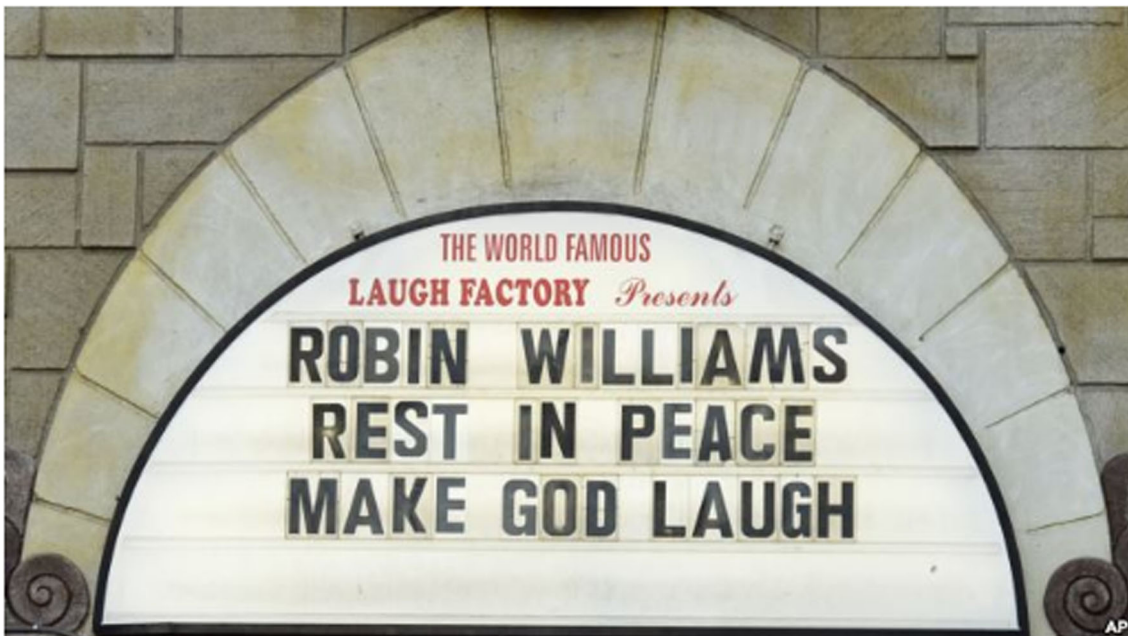


radio / NOW!

Psychologist: Know the Warning Signs of Suicide

Print Share:



A man takes a photo of a the marquee of the Laugh Factory with a message in memory of actor Robin Williams displayed, in the Hollywood district of Los Angeles Monday, Aug. 11, 2014.

Recommend

Share 12

g+1 1

Pin it

RELATED ARTICLES

- Sheriff's Official: Actor Robin Williams Hanged Himself
- Broadway Pays Tribute to Robin Williams

WASHINGTON, DC—The suicide of comedian and entertainer Robin Williams continues to reverberate worldwide. VOA Now! Host David Byrd spoke with psychologist [Ildiko Tabori](#), a licensed psychologist in Los Angeles and the psychologist in residence at the [Laugh Factory](#) about Williams's suicide and how to prevent such tragedies.

BYRD: How common is depression in suicides?

TABORI: Well, depression is the number one factor when it comes to suicidality. People tend to come out of their depression just a little bit just prior to an actual attempt or something that gets carried through. The theory is that they've resolved something in their heads – that they are planning on doing what they are about to do – so the depression tends to lift a little bit. But what we do see is that depression is extremely prevalent, especially with comedians, and very widespread throughout this industry among the general population. The other thing that we fail to recognize sometimes that when we are depressed and we are in the middle of depression we don't recognize that it is something that is fleeting, that things will change. What we do

need to do is garnish the support that we need – from family, friends, professionals, anybody really. But people tend not to do that because they are afraid and the stigma is very, very present still.

BYRD: Robin Williams was also known to struggle with substance abuse – particularly cocaine – and alcohol. How common is substance abuse in the lives of comedians? I can think of people like Richard Pryor, or John Belushi, or Sam Kinison?



in Los Angeles

TABORI: Substance abuse is very prevalent in the entertainment industry, but especially among stand-up comedians, more so I think than in the general population, because this is – for all intents and purposes – a very lonely profession. You are up there on a stage and while you are being loved and making people laugh and making people feel good, you walk away from that stage and after everybody has gone, you're left by yourself for everything that is spinning in your head. And that loneliness does creep in. You go home, or you're out on the road – I get most of my calls from comedians when they are out on the road and find themselves sitting in a hotel room: a damp, dark, sometimes even dingy hotel room needing some support. But at least they're doing that, at least they are reaching out.

BYRD: Many people often think of comedians as being happy and funny all the time, but you have said that depression and bipolar disorder are very common. It's often said that comedians can't be funny if they aren't in *pain*. What are some warning signs that people should look for if someone that they know – whether they are a performer or a business associate – is contemplating suicide?

TABORI: Some of the big warning signs with suicidality are: the *depression* that is there. You look for people who *tend to be isolative*, people who will have *changes in their sleeping and their appetites*, if there is *considerable gaining or losing of weight* in a very short period of time, if people are *extremely fatigued* – whether they are not sleeping at all or are sleeping a lot they can still be very fatigued. There is something that we call *anhedonia* which is this inability to experience pleasure in everyday life; kind of like 'stop and smell the roses' kind of thing, they can't appreciate the fragrance that's there. Those are the things that you would want to recognize. And the behaviors coincide with a finality of things: *giving away of personal possessions* that are meaningful, the kind of *good-byes* that people will do prior to a suicide attempt.

BYRD: How do you think this is going to affect the general public and other performers, particularly at somewhere like the Laugh Factory?

TABORI: Well, it's definitely going to affect the general public – it is affecting all of us. I am extremely sad; I was stunned to read the news (August 11) I was absolutely heart-broken. But with the comedians themselves, this was somebody that they idolized, somebody that they looked up to. And I wouldn't be surprised if – I know I hear my phone beeping a lot right now – if there was some acting out behavior from the comedians. They think sometimes that just some success and money will make everything better, but that's not always the case. Look at Robin Williams – he had success, he had fame, *everybody* loved him, everybody adored him and admired him. And he was still very depressed and engaging in self-medicating behaviors.

BYRD: What can people do to process Robin's death?

TABORI: I think that the best thing that we can do when dealing with a suicide, any suicide, is to make sure we reach out for support from the people who are around us and from mental health professionals. This is sad. It's extremely heart breaking, and we as a general public and as individuals in the world are going to experience a lot of emotions throughout the days and the next few weeks to come – maybe even years. And we're going to feel sad, we're going to heart broken, we are going to feel very angry at times, too. And we have to – again – gather the people around us and hug them, and love them, and get some support, and *talk*. But the other thing that we need to do right now, especially with Robin Williams, is try to find some goodness in this and find out what lessons can be learned. And maybe this might be the cathartic moment that we recognize that we need to reduce the stigma when it comes to mental illness. Just hug each other, and love each other, and recognize that depression and feelings and thoughts of wanting to hurt yourselves are fleeting, and they will go away, and you *can* feel better.