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## What's the 211?

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It starts, like many instant message chats, with a teen complaining about relationship troubles, school or parents.

But it soon becomes frightening, as talk turns to abuse, rape, self-mutilation and even suicide.

Advertisement In the last two months, four of the more than 75 messages received by the Palm Beach/Treasure Coast 211 via AOL Instant Messenger have been from teens who were suicidal, said Community Relations Specialist Tara Martin.

The organization, which provides information, referral and crisis information to those in need of any age, is making a greater effort to reach out to teens through teen-friendly AOL and MySpace, where 211 maintains a page.

"Youth have a lot of issues they're facing, and they don't know there are resources," Martin said. "The grim nature of problems that teens in general are expressing via IM continue to reinforce the need to further promote this worthwhile service to make it available to more individuals contending with such severe issues."

The organization received a grant earlier this year from the Community Foundation for Palm Beach and Martin Counties to promote its resources for teens.

Martin, and colleagues in Indian River and Palm Beach counties, also travel to schools to explain the service to teens, and to recruit teen ambassadors who act as a referral service to other teens. While the ambassadors can't, and aren't, expected to counsel other students, it's still true that when kids have problems, they're likely to turn to their friends before anyone else, Martin said.

The ambassador program just started on the Treasure Coast, and doesn't yet have any volunteers. But it's about two years old in Palm Beach County, where there are about 30 ambassadors from 20 schools who have been through training and are armed with information to present to classmates.

"With teenagers, there's so much thrown at them, at a time when they both want their independence, but they still want someone to have their back," said Community Relations Specialist Patrice Schroeder.

When Schroeder speaks in schools, she said the teens often pretend they aren't interested in what she has to say, but she's sure they're listening.

"I tell them, you may not need this yourself, you may not need it today, or tomorrow, but at least you have this information to empower you," she said. "211 is a great resource for them."

## **What is the Palm Beach/Treasure Coast 211?**

A confidential, 24-hour, seven-day community service helpline and crisis hot line providing immediate guidance and support for individuals and families who find themselves without answers to problems.

### **How do you access 211?**

1. Dial 211 on any phone
2. Through AOL Instant Messenger, go to [www.aim.com](http://www.aim.com) and IM either screen name TEEN211PBTC1 or TEEN211PBTC2. Service is available from 3 to 11 p.m.
3. Through MySpace, search using the e-mail address [TEEN211PBTC1@yahoo.com](mailto:TEEN211PBTC1@yahoo.com)

### **By the numbers:**

Number of instant messages received by 211:

March: 28

April: 49

Number from suicidal teens: 4

Number of MySpace page views: 54

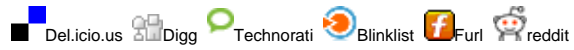
### **How to become a teen ambassador:**

- Earn four hours of community service per month
- Attend monthly meetings
- Distribute various materials to peers and school staff
- Make periodic announcements
- Consult on issues that teens are facing
- Call 211 or (772) 766-0326

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