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Sign outside Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. (Spectrum News 13)

Therapists Call for More Access to Treatment After Parkland Suicides

BY JEFF ALLEN | ORLANDO

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ORLANDO, Fla. -- Parents, school administrators and community leaders in south Florida are scrambling to take action after two students at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School took their own lives in the last week.

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classmates can't afford it

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February 2019 marked one year since the horrific mass shooting at the school.

Licensed therapists in Orlando, who've been counseling Parkland students dealing with the aftermath of the tragedy, say students need more access to effective treatment.

Alexandra was a sophomore at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School when a gunman opened fire on February 14, 2018 –killing 17 people. She says many students have had trouble affording mental health treatment – or finding treatment that works.

"It's almost like its re-traumatizing them because they have to tell their story over and over and over again to multiple people, and then they give up hope," she said.

After a year of seeing several counselors, she says she finally found a treatment that helped.

"I felt like a weight was lifted off of me, and the next day there was a loud noise and I didn't jump," Alexandra said.

Alexandra went through **RTM treatment**, which stands for Reconsolidation of Traumatic Memories.

Kari Russo, a licensed therapist at First Orlando Counseling, has found success using the treatment to treat veterans with PTSD. Russo says RTM helps someone get past painful memories – without having to rehash them. She's also found it effective in treating students who lived through the Parkland shooting.

"RTM breaks the connection between that overwhelming emotion of like your brain being hijacked – and the event," Russo said.

"They can literally see a difference the day after, or that very day," said CJ Varghese, a licensed therapist at First Orlando Counseling.

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But she worries many of her classmates haven't found the right treatment – or can't afford it.

"I just want to be able to help people and that's why I want more people to know about this therapy because it helped me so much," Alexandra said.

Russo says with the recent student suicides, there's no time to waste.

"It's paramount we get this out there because it's just a matter of time if we don't."

Russo has reached out to different sources for funding in order to treat students in Parkland and train other therapists so they can help as well. She says she'd like to see state lawmakers institute funding to make sure every student gets the help they need.

If you or someone you know is struggling, don't hesitate to seek help. The [National Suicide Prevention Hotline](#) is available 24 hours a day at 1-800-273-8255.

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