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OPINION

Suicide at 7: Children need our protection

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The April 16 suicide death of 7-year-old Gabriel Myers, a foster child in the care of the Florida Department of Children and Families, shocks the conscience.

Gabriel apparently hanged himself with the shower hose in the bathroom of his foster home in Margate.

The victim of sexual abuse and neglect that resulted in being placed in foster care, Gabriel had been prescribed mind-altering psychotropic medications while in foster care to deal with the myriad behavioral problems he was experiencing, no doubt largely the result of the abuse he had suffered.

Reports are that he was on three or four different drugs, or combinations of drugs, at the time of his death, all at the tender age of 7.

Most such drugs have never been tested for pediatric use. Their prescription and use with kids is generally "off label," meaning there are no approved instructions or guidelines.

Too often, these drugs are used by the Department of Children and Families as chemical restraints to deal with difficult children who exhibit undesirable, inappropriate or dangerous behavior.

Rather than deal with their underlying issues and problems, drugs are used to turn these children into zombies so that they can be safely placed in a foster home or institution.

A 2005 study revealed that 1 out of every 4 foster children in Florida is on some sort of psychotropic medication, including multiple children less than 1 year of age!

Never mind that no research has been done as to the long-term effects of such medications on a growing child's brain.

Such use of these medications is reprehensible and amounts to warehousing children.

The goal should be to protect and rehabilitate children who have been harmed and damaged by abuse, abandonment or neglect, not simply to store them away safely, only to be shown the door when they turn 18 and age-out of the foster care system.

In this case, little Gabriel didn't even get that far.

Such a short, traumatic life, abruptly and prematurely ended in an equally tragic manner.

Godspeed, little Gabriel.

We're sorry.

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