

How Adults Can Help to Prevent Suicide

Suicide is the leading cause of death among school age children and teens. During the COVID-19 outbreak, many youths, their family members and friends, and school staff and community members may experience signs of stress and distress such as:

- Fearing and worrying about your health and the health of friends, family, and loved ones.
- Changing eating or sleeping patterns.
- Having difficulty concentrating.
- Having worsening health problems.
- Feeling alone and needing social support from friends and family.
- Feeling separated from friends or family.
- Feeling sad, anxious, grouchy or moody.
- Avoiding activities that you enjoy.

It is important to remember that **everyone reacts differently to stressful situations**. How you respond to the outbreak can depend on your background, experience, access to information, social support and the community you live in.

Taking care of ourselves and our youth

Emotions like fear, sadness, anger, frustration and anxiety are natural responses to the COVID-19 outbreak. Many adults and youth will experience some or all of these emotions and others as we cope with the Coronavirus.

It is essential that adults take care of their physical and emotional needs so that we can be available to respond to youth in crisis. Actions to keep ourselves well might include:

- Talking with trusted others about your concerns and feelings.
- Taking breaks from watching television, playing video games, listening to, watching or reading the news, and being aware of how social media affects your mood.
- Making time to regularly with friends and family online or by telephone or text.
- Doing your best to get plenty of sleep, eat healthy meals, and exercise regularly.
- Taking time to relax, unwind, do things that you enjoy, or try something new.
- Avoiding alcohol and drugs.
- Having conversations with others about things other than the Coronavirus outbreak.
- Making a list of things that you like to do, or people that you can talk to over the phone, text, chat, or social media, and consider creating a regular schedule of activities each day.

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When to ask for help

It is important to remember that we are all in this situation together. Particularly during the school closure, many children, teens and adults will feel alone, afraid, and unsure of what to do, and parents will be concerned with caring for their children. It is important to talk with a trusted professional if you or your child or student are experiencing three or more of the following for **more than a few days at a time**:

- Feelings of sadness, depression or a lot of irritability.
- Feelings of hopelessness or ongoing worries about the future.
- Feeling a lack of interest in activities that you used to enjoy.
- Having significant changes in your appetite or weight.
- Having significant changes in your sleep patterns.
- Feeling that you're too tired to move, work or play most of the time.
- Feeling hyper or agitated most of the time, or having a very hard time relaxing.
- Feeling worthless or very guilty.
- Having a very difficult time concentrating and making decisions.
- Having thoughts of, or plans to hurt yourself or others.

Suicide Risk Factors

There are certain factors that are linked to increased risk for suicidal behavior. These include:

- Previous suicide attempt(s)
- Isolation and aloneness
- Non-suicidal self-injury (e.g., cutting)
- Mental illness including depression, behavior problems, and substance abuse
- High levels of family stress
- Family history of suicide
- Environmental risks, including presence of a firearm in the home
- Situational crises (e.g., the presence of a gun in the home, bullying and harassment, serious disciplinary action, death of a loved one, physical or sexual abuse, breakup of a relationship/friendship, divorce, family violence, suicide of a peer)

It is important to be aware of these risks, and to take them seriously.

Suicide Warning Signs

Most youth and adults who are considering suicide demonstrate one or more behaviors that may be signs of suicidal thinking or plans. These include:

- Suicidal threats in the form of direct (e.g., "I am going to kill myself", "I want to die.") and indirect (e.g., "I wish I could fall asleep and never wake up again") statements
- Suicide notes and plans (**including online postings**)

Mental Health and Social Supports



- Making final arrangements (e.g., giving away prized possessions)
- Preoccupation with death
- Changes in behavior, appearance, thoughts, and/or feelings.

Preventing Suicide

The most important thing that we can do to prevent youth and adult suicide is to take the threat seriously. Particularly during times of high stress, youths and adults may feel anxious, afraid, alone, and overwhelmed. Some people may show few if any signs of their distress. There are a number of important steps that adults can take to keep youths and other adults safe.

1. **Provide a safe environment, and a safe, supportive, trusting relationship** where children, teens and other adults feel comfortable discussing their thoughts, feelings and concerns. If that is not possible in your household, encourage youths and others to speak with adults who can provide safety, security and trust like mental health professionals or counselors, medical professionals, elders, adult family members, or spiritual or religious advisors.
2. **Become aware of and make use of other resources to support youths and families.** These may include family and peer support, school and community members, school-based health clinics, crisis teams, trained mental health and medical professionals, religious or spiritual advisors, professional adults trained in identifying and intervening with students at risk for suicidal behavior, national and local crisis services listed above.
 - a. **Lines for Life will provide a remote suicide risk assessment and safety planning service for schools. Call 503-575-3760.**
 - b. [Youthline teen peer support](#): 877-968-8491, Text teen2teen 839863
3. **Create networks of supportive adults.** School mental health and crisis team members, school-based health center staff, local mental health and medical professionals, and emergency personnel are responsible for conducting suicide risk assessments, warning/informing parents and family members, offering recommendations and referrals to community services, and often providing follow up counseling and support at school or in the community. Collaborating between adults, families, schools, local agencies and public health departments is essential for keeping youths and adults safe.
4. **Never ignore or keep information a secret.** Peers and family members should not agree to keep the suicidal thoughts of a friend a secret and instead should tell an adult, such as a parent, teacher, school psychologist, doctor, or mental health provider. **If you believe a threat to be urgent or immediate CALL 911 or a local crisis line.** In non-emergency circumstances, parents and other adults should seek help from community mental health resources as soon as possible. School staff who are aware of a youth at risk for suicide should take the student to the designated school mental health professional or administrator, or consult with a local mental health professional.
5. **Get immediate help if a suicide threat seems serious.**
 - a. Contact one or more of the resources listed at the end of this document.

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6. **Stay informed by making use of these and other resources.** Here are a few suggestions for responding to the Coronavirus outbreak.
 - a. The National Child Traumatic Stress Network has a [guide for parents and caregivers](#) to help families cope with the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19).
 - b. SAMHSA's ["Taking Care of Your Behavioral Health" page](#) provides tips for social distancing, quarantine and isolation during an infectious disease outbreak.

Suicide is preventable

It is important to remember that suicide is preventable. Youth and adults who are contemplating suicide often give warning signs of their distress. **It is very important to always take these warning signs seriously, and never promise to keep them a secret.** If you suspect that a child or adolescent or someone you know may be suicidal and are not sure what to do, **contact one of suicide prevention resources listed above as soon as possible.**

If you or someone you know is experiencing severe emotional distress or is suicidal, GET HELP IMMEDIATELY by contacting one or more of the following:

- Call **911** or your local crisis line
- [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#) in English: **1-800-273-TALK**
- [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#) en español: **1-888-628-9454**
- [Crisis Text Line](#) in English: **Text "OREGON" to 741741**
- [Crisis Text Line](#) en español: **Texto con la palabra "AYUDA" to 741741**
- Crisis Text Line for those who are experiencing the trauma of racism: **Text "Indigenous" to 741741**
- [Teen Line](#): **1-310-855-HOPE (4673)**
- National Youth Crisis Hotline: **1-800-448-4663**
- [Find Crisis Services in Your County](#)
- Substance use help: **1-800-662-HELP (4357)**
- For Peers: [Links to warmlines in every state](#), [Lifeline Crisis Chat](#)
- For Youth: [Oregon Youthline](#), call **877-968-8491**, text **"teen2teen" to 839863**
- For LGBTQ2SIA+ Youth: [The Trevor Project](#), call **866-488-7386** for a 24-hour toll-free suicide hotline, call [Trans Lifeline](#) at **1-877-565-8860**
- For Native Youth: [Native Crisis Text Line](#), text **"Native" to 741741**, [WeRNative](#), [You are Not Alone Network](#)
- When a Friend Dies: [Guidelines for Students](#)

Suicide Prevention Training Resources for School Personnel

- For those seeking additional training on how to recognize the signs of suicide and connect students to help: [Question, Persuade, Refer – 1.5 hr-long online training](#)
- Contact qpr@linesforlife.org to access free online training opportunities sponsored by the Oregon Health Authority.