

SUICIDE AWARENESS AND PREVENTION TOOLKIT

FOR SCHOOLS AND PARENTS

HOW TO HELP A FRIEND



NAMI - New York State

www.nami.org

988 SUICIDE & CRISIS LIFELINE

The 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline is a United States-based suicide prevention network of over 160 crisis centers that provides 24/7 service via a toll-free hotline with the number 9-8-8. It is available to anyone in suicidal crisis or emotional distress

YOU CAN
CALL 988, TEXT
988 OR CHAT VIA
THE LIFELINE'S
WEBSITE
(988LIFELINE.ORG)



What You Need to Know About Youth Suicide

Suicidal thoughts are common among teens and young adults. In fact, about 11% of young adults (ages 18-25) report that they've had serious thoughts about suicide, and about 1–2% report a suicide attempt during the prior year. These numbers are higher among high school students — nearly 20% report serious thoughts about suicide and 9% report a suicide attempt. Among young adults 15–24 years old in the U.S., the rate of death by suicide in 2019 was about 14 per 100,000 people — slightly higher than one suicide for every 10,000 people in this age group.

These numbers are frightening, but there is also hope — if we can identify and support young people who are experiencing mental health symptoms, including thinking about suicide, we have an opportunity to help prevent tragedy. There is a large gap between the number of young people thinking about suicide (about 1 in 10) and the number who die by suicide (1 in 10,000). In other words, there are 1,000 young people currently struggling with the idea of ending their life for each young person lost to suicide. Most importantly, that means that there are 1,000 opportunities to provide understanding and support to those experiencing difficulties.

Common Risk Factors

Anyone who is having serious or continuing thoughts of suicide, having impulses to self-harm or making plans for suicide needs to be connected to care and support services.

There are quite a few things that have been associated with increased risk for suicide:

- Prior suicide attempts
- Family history of suicide
- History of mental health conditions such as severe depression, anxiety disorders and psychotic disorders
- Substance misuse
- Impulsivity or aggressiveness
- Serious family problems
- Breakups or other major relationship losses
- Access to means for self-harm (unsecured firearms, prescription medications, poisons)
- Social isolation
- History of traumatic experiences such as sexual violence or severe episodes of racial prejudice/violence, bullying
- Lack of access to mental health care
- Multiple exposures to suicide in one's community or through unsafe coverage of suicide in the media

While the risk factors noted above might increase someone's long term risk for suicide, there are several things that might indicate that the person's thoughts of suicide are escalating or that there is more acute risk:

- Talking, joking or posting online about dying or life not being worth living
- Feelings of hopelessness, shame or of being a burden to others
- Extreme sadness, anger or irritability
- Extreme feelings of emotional pain
- Planning or researching ways to die
- Withdrawal from others, saying or posting "goodbye" messages, giving away possessions
- Erratic or disorganized behavior
- Changes in substance use
- Seeking means to self-harm

High Risk Factors

Risk of suicide varies across different identity and cultural groups — in many cases, historically disadvantaged communities who experience discrimination, social/environmental stressors and limited access to care and support resources also experience higher rates of suicide.

Historically, Black Americans have died by suicide at lower rates than the general public, but the rates of suicide among Black people — particularly youth — have increased in recent years. Fortunately, this crisis is beginning to receive the necessary level of attention. The Emergency Taskforce on Black Youth Suicide and Mental Health, established in 2019 by the Congressional Black Caucus released a report outlining research, policy and practice recommendations to address the crisis of suicide in Black youth, including significant increases in National Institutes of Health (NIH) and National Institutes of Mental Health (NIMH) funding for research focused on the issue.

Indigenous communities, such as Alaskan Natives, have also had higher rates of suicide than the general population due to generational trauma, poverty and stigma, among other factors. The best way to address the dangers of suicide is to build a comprehensive, culturally competent program within the community. One example of a movement to build such programs is the Indian Country Child Trauma Center which was established to develop training, technical assistance, program development and resources on trauma-informed care to tribal communities.

Youth who identify as LGBTQI are also at a higher risk for suicide than the general population.

Encouragingly, states that have passed same-sex marriage laws have seen rates of adolescent suicide drop by 7%. The association between the laws and a lower suicide risk was concentrated among students who identified as “sexual minorities” showing evidence that laws supporting the LGBTQI community also help prevent youth suicide.

Common Protective Factors

There are many factors that can also help to protect someone against suicidal ideation or behavior that include:

- Effective coping and problem-solving skills
- Strong social and family connections
- Access to quality mental health care
- Support from religious or social communities
- Lack of access to means to self-harm

What to Do If You Are Worried About Yourself or Someone You Love

The best way to help prevent a suicide-related crisis is to seek help and support before the crisis emerges. In the last 50 years, we have made significant progress in reducing rates of people dying from heart disease; this success is largely due to health care professionals getting better at identifying and treating high blood pressure, high cholesterol and blocked arteries before people have heart attacks or develop serious heart disease. The same applies to getting better at preventing suicide; if you are experiencing thoughts of self-harm, it is essential to get mental health care as soon as the symptoms start before reaching a crisis state.

If you or someone you love begins to feel worried, but doesn't feel in immediate danger of acting on thoughts of self-harm or suicide, then steps should be taken to find help for care and support. This help can be from a pediatrician or primary health care provider, or a mental health clinician. If the person is already receiving care, let the clinician know about what is going on. Supportive family member or friends, also need to be informed about what is going on. They can be a tremendous source of support for the youth and the family.

If contacting a clinician and alerting loved ones isn't practical — or if you or the person you love is having urges to harm yourself — then contact should be made immediately with a crisis hotline like the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 988 or Crisis Text Line (text "NAMI" to 741-741). These and other resources are confidential, and many have options for phone, text or online chat communication.

If you feel there is immediate danger, go to the nearest hospital emergency room and explain to them what you are experiencing. If you cannot get to the hospital, call 911 (or a local crisis line) and explain your situation in detail — many communities have first responders trained to support young people experiencing a mental health crisis so they can get you the most appropriate help. If possible, let a family member or friend know as well — they should stay with you for support and help make sure your environment is safe (removing any dangerous means for self-harm).

Helpful Responses For When A Friend Is In Distress

If someone you care about is showing some of the risk factors noted above, the first thing to try is having a conversation with them to express your concern. It is best if you can do this in person — face to face — and in a quiet, private place.

Explain why you are concerned about your friend and tell them what you have observed. The more specific and clear you can be the better. For example:

"You seem sad all the time and have stopped communicating with your friends."

"You always seem very tired and distracted."

"You are posting really scary messages on social media."

Tell them you are worried and let them know they can talk to you if they are experiencing a problem. It can feel awkward to ask about this, but it could be the encouragement they need to be able to open up about what they are experiencing. Remember that it is not your responsibility to try to solve their problem or fix the situation. Listening patiently and asking them to tell you more will help you understand what your friend might need.

The most urgent information to find out when you speak to a friend about their mental or emotional distress is whether they are at risk of self-harm. If they have already told you or someone else that they are thinking about hurting themselves, or posted about it on social media, then the next step is getting them connected to help.

If Your Friend Does Not Seem to Be in Immediate Risk of Harm

Once you know how your friend is feeling, ask if they have any ideas for what might help. You can ask if they are taking steps to get help from family, friends or professionals. If you are comfortable, and they are open to it, you can offer to check in again with them sometime soon to see how they are doing and whether the situation is improving or getting worse.

Think about how you might feel if you were in a similar situation and what might be helpful to you. Remember that you don't need to solve the problem. Often, just being open to listening and being supportive is helpful.

If Your Friend Tells You They Are Having Thoughts of Self-Harm

First, do not agree to keep it a secret — even if they don't want anyone else to know, it is important to get help if you are truly afraid that they will hurt themselves. Getting help could involve letting their family know about the crisis, unless you have a clear reason to think that will make things worse (for example, they have shared that their parents do not support them or they have been mistreated or experienced rejection at home). If you are at college or a boarding school, let the campus crisis team, residence life staff or counseling service know you are worried about your friend.

If you feel the problem is urgent and serious, you can contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 988 or Crisis Text Line (“NAMI” to 741-741). If there is immediate danger to your friend or others, you should either try to take them to a local hospital emergency service or call 911.

If you can, and you feel safe doing so, try to stay with them until they have gotten help and you know they are safe. This can be especially important if your friend is dangerously intoxicated, or if they are experiencing serious mental health symptoms, like psychosis. Whatever steps you take, know that you are not alone.

Your support could make a huge difference for your friend — but in a crisis, you can count on crisis support lines, first responders, health care providers and others to manage this difficult situation together. It's also important to let an adult you trust know what is going on so they can help you support your friend.



HOW TO

HELP A FRIEND



KNOW THE 10 COMMON WARNING SIGNS

- 1 Feeling very sad or withdrawn for more than two weeks
- 2 Seriously trying to harm or kill oneself or making plans to do so
- 3 Severe out-of-control risk-taking behaviors
- 4 Sudden overwhelming fear for no reason
- 5 Not eating, throwing up or using laxatives to lose weight; significant weight loss/gain
- 6 Seeing, hearing, or believing things that are not real
- 7 Repeatedly using drugs or alcohol
- 8 Drastic changes in mood, behavior, personality, or sleeping habits
- 9 Extreme difficulty concentrating or staying still
- 10 Intense worries or fears that get in the way of daily activities

Start the Conversation

"It worries me to hear you talking like this. Let's talk to someone about it."

"I've noticed you're [eating less, sleeping more, etc.]. I'm here if you need to talk."

"Tell me more about what's happening. Maybe if I understand better, we can find a solution together."

Offer Support

"Would you like me to go with you to a support group or meeting?"

"I really want to help, what can I do to help you right now?"

"Let's sit down together and look for places to get help. I can go with you too."

Be a Friend

"It worries me to hear you talking like this. Let's talk to someone about it."

"I've noticed you're [eating less, sleeping more, etc.]. I'm here if you need to talk."

"Tell me more about what's happening. Maybe if I understand better, we can find a solution together."





NAMI Ending the Silence is an engaging presentation that helps middle and high school aged youth learn about the warning signs of mental health conditions and what steps to take if you or a loved one are showing symptoms of a mental health condition.

NAMI Ending the Silence is offered in-person by NAMI affiliates across the country and is also now available online when an in-person presentation is not available.

NAMI Ending The Silence In Person

Ending the Silence is a free, evidence-based, 50-minute session designed for middle and high school students. Your students will learn about mental health conditions through a brief presentation, short videos, and personal testimony from a young adult who describes their journey to recovery.

NAMI Ending the Silence presentations include two leaders: one who shares an informative presentation and a young adult with a mental health condition who shares their journey of recovery. Audience members can ask questions and gain understanding of an often-misunderstood topic.

Through dialogue, we can help grow the movement to end stigma.

NAMI Ending The Silence Online

The online version is identical to the in-person version, but offered exclusively via online video, accessible anytime through the NAMI Ending the Silence website. Note: The online version is only offered in situations where no local presenters are available.

What Your Audience Will Get

- Free of cost to schools and communities
- NAMI Ending the Silence for Students: 50-minute presentation designed for middle and high school students that includes warning signs, facts and statistics and how to get help for themselves or a friend. Research has shown that NAMI Ending the Silence for Students is effective in changing middle and high school students' knowledge and attitudes toward mental health conditions and toward seeking help
- NAMI Ending the Silence for School Staff (in person only): 1-hour presentation for school staff members that includes information about warning signs, facts and statistics, how to approach students and how to work with families
- NAMI Ending the Silence for Families (in person only): 1-hour presentation for adults with middle or high school aged youth that includes warning signs, facts and statistics, how to talk with your child and how to work with school staff

What People Are Saying

"I'm really grateful and glad that you talked to us. I often feel very alone or weird because many kids my age don't understand. But, now I'm sure they would be more supportive of me." -Student

"Thank you, Renee, for coming to my school and sharing your story. You have changed my life forever. The things you explained about your depression relate to how I feel. When I got home, I immediately talked to my parents and hopefully I will get some help." -Student

"It is amazing what just one day, one talk can do. You never really know what's going on in the brain of any particular student." -Teacher

"Recently parents from two different families reached out to me after their children had seen NAMI Ending the Silence. Both were thanking me for the work we do along with being grateful to know about us as a resource. They were able to have very meaningful and open conversations with their children/students and happy they are getting this information in the school setting." -ETS Program Leader

Resources For Youth



<https://www.activeminds.org/>



<https://www.thetrevorproject.org/>



<https://mylifeisworthliving.org/>

<https://www.ditchthelabel.org/>



<https://www.loveisrespect.org/>



<https://www.notokapp.com/>

stopbullying.gov

<https://www.stopbullying.gov/>



YOU MATTER

**HTTPS://YOUMATTER
.988LIFELINE.ORG/**

YOUTH SUICIDE WARNING SIGNS

<https://www.youthsuicidewarningsigns.org/youth>

Find out how this could help save a life at
www.BeThe1To.com

If you're struggling, call the Lifeline at
988

<https://www.bethe1to.com/about/>

Resources

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline- <https://988lifeline.org/>

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (the Lifeline) at 988 has crisis workers to support you and are available 24/7.

Crisis Text Line- <https://www.crisistextline.org/>

You can text with a crisis counselor who is available to provide support 24/7

Local crisis services- <https://www.knowdebt.org/resources/assistance-agencies/state-resources/state-crisis-hotlines/>

Your city or state may have crisis services that can be available to you as well.

Navigating a Mental Health Crisis Guide- <https://www.nami.org/Support-Education/Publications-Reports/Guides/Navigating-a-Mental-Health-Crisis>

Provides important, potentially life-saving information for people experiencing mental health crises and their loved ones. This guide outlines what can contribute to a crisis, warning signs that a crisis is emerging, strategies to help de-escalate a crisis, available resources and so much more.

SAMSHA-<https://www.samhsa.gov/>

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) is the agency within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services that leads public health efforts to advance the behavioral health of the nation. SAMHSA's mission is to reduce the impact of substance abuse and mental illness on America's communities.

The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention-www.afsp.org

Whether you have struggled with suicide yourself or have lost a loved one, know you are not alone. Hear about personal experiences from people in your local community whose lives have been impacted by suicide.

NAMI- Meet Little Monster Coloring Book- <https://files.constantcontact.com/9d08e137201/8dd6206e-2352-4100-9d1c-1e78dd921093.pdf?rdr=true>

Stand Up To Stress Coloring Book - <https://files.constantcontact.com/9d08e137201/c7dc985d-f9e1-4d95-bb6c-ae0c7ec77715.pdf?rdr=true>

NAMI-New York State and the Local Affiliates -<https://www.naminys.org/nys/affiliates-orgs/>

NAMI-NYS is the state organization of the National Alliance on Mental Illness, the nation's largest grassroots organization for people with mental illness and their families. Founded in 1979, NAMI has affiliates in every state and in more than 1,100 local communities across the country.

NAMI-NYS provides support to family and friends of individuals with mental illness and persons living with mental illnesses through more than 50 affiliates statewide.