

Keeping Our Kids Safe: Suicide Prevention



The heartache is unimaginable...yet some of you are living it.

Every year in the United States, more than 45,000 people take their own lives. Suicide is the second-leading cause of death for teens and young adults, ages 10-34 (CDC, 2022). When death by suicide happens, the "suicide survivors" have not only lost someone they care about deeply, but they are left with complex and traumatic grieving and an ongoing struggle to understand why it happened.

- In 2022, suicide rates in the U.S. reached an all-time high
- Approximately 25% of young adults ages 18-24 report having seriously considered suicide (higher than any other adult age group.)
- Over 18% of high school students reported having seriously considered suicide in the past year, with females higher at 24%, and LGBTQ+ teens at almost 47%.
- Almost 9% of high school students have attempted suicide, with females highest at 11%, black teens at almost 12%, and LGBTQ+ teens at 23.4%.

[Source: CDC, 2020]

The need for effective suicide prevention strategies has never been greater.



Want to know more? Looking for support? Contact the Parent/Professional Advocacy League (PPAL) to talk to a parent with lived experience or attend a parent support group or workshop.

- (866)815-8122
- <https://www.PPAL.net>
- info@PPAL.net
- facebook.com/PPAL.net

Keeping Our Kids Safe: Suicide Prevention

One such strategy taking hold at the individual and community level is the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention's (AFSP) campaign "Talk Away The Dark" and its program "Talk Saves Lives." Talk Away The Dark emphasizes that talking is the first step in preventing suicide. We need to bring suicide out of the shadows. Often, when we think someone is struggling, we worry in silence. We don't know what to say, or are afraid that we'll say the wrong thing, so we say nothing. If you are in that situation, AFSP recommends that you **assume that you are the only person that will reach out to the person struggling.** By having a brave, real, open, and honest conversation with the person you care about, you can make a difference, and maybe save a life.



**American
Foundation
for Suicide
Prevention**

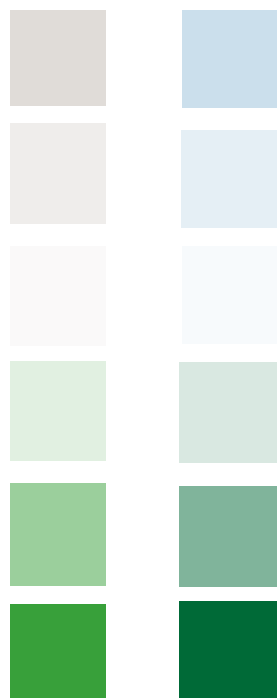
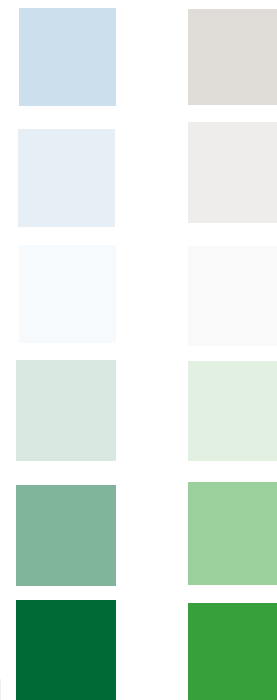


How do you start the conversation? First, let people know that you're willing to talk about mental health. Share your own story. Have there been times that you've struggled and sought help? Let people know that. It helps them to feel safe with you. Approach your loved one privately. Grab a coffee or take a walk. Start by expressing care for them and then follow it with an observation. For example, you might say "I care about you and have noticed that you haven't been yourself lately. How are you doing?" Make sure they know that they are not saddling you with the problems and that you are willing to listen to the details and go to the dark place with them. But also make sure that you have resources to give them, can offer to help them find a therapist, or make a call if needed. And by all means, follow up: "How are you feeling since we spoke?" can make a real difference.



Keeping Our Kids Safe: Suicide Prevention

One of AFSP’s programs, Talk Saves Lives: An Introduction to Suicide Prevention, is a community-based presentation that covers the general scope of the suicide crisis, the research on what causes people to consider suicide and other factors that might put people at risk, proactive and protective factors for lowering risk and managing mental health, warning signs and behaviors, how to get help, and what you can do in your community (and family!) to save lives. It is powerful and proactive. **PPAL is pleased to be able to provide this program to families, schools, and communities. We invite you to join us for an upcoming presentation (see Calendar/Events on our webpage.) This is where you can start to make a difference.**



Another strategy gaining momentum is the "Zero Suicide" initiative aimed at healthcare (including behavioral healthcare) providers and systems - so, a framework for system-wide transformation relating to patient safety and safe suicide care (www.zerosuicide.edc.org). While self-described as aspirational, Zero Suicide recognizes that people experiencing suicidal thoughts and urges often fall through the cracks in the health care system. Most people that die by suicide saw a health care provider in the prior year. Zero Suicide requires a transformational, systems-wide approach to improving outcomes and closing gaps. It emphasizes a system-wide commitment to better identify, assess, and support those at risk of suicide. A Zero Suicide Toolkit and other free implementation resources are available to support systems taking on the challenge.

The Zero Suicide approach advocates for early intervention, destigmatizing mental health, and promoting an environment where young individuals feel comfortable seeking help. Prevention strategies encompass various aspects of a young person's life, including family, school, and community support systems.

Keeping Our Kids Safe: Suicide Prevention

1. Early Identification and Intervention

Early identification of warning signs and risk factors associated with youth suicide is crucial. Parents, educators, healthcare providers, and peers need to be educated about these signs to act promptly. Encouraging open communication and creating safe spaces for young individuals to share their feelings and concerns can be instrumental in early intervention. Warning signs and risk factors are not always present or evident. Talking with your child as much as possible and, more importantly, listening to them, is crucial. If you feel like something is “off”, pursue it. [see page 23 for warning signs and risk factors]

2. Promoting Mental Health Awareness

Fostering a widespread culture that promotes mental health awareness and de-stigmatizes seeking help is vital. Our children need to know that it's ok not to be ok. And, it's even better when they share it with others. Educational programs in schools and faith communities, public awareness campaigns, and community discussions can help eradicate the stigma surrounding mental health issues, encouraging early help-seeking behavior by our children.

3. Building a Supportive Community Network

Community support provides a solid foundation in preventing youth suicide. Creating support networks involving mental health professionals, teachers, parents, community organizations, and community members facilitates a collaborative, team-centered approach to supporting our youth. These networks can provide resources, interventions, and a sense of belonging for our kids, contributing to a safer environment. It's easier to speak up when we are surrounded by people who care and encourage it.

Preventing youth suicide requires a collective effort. By embracing these strategies and fostering a supportive community that prioritizes our children's mental health, we take one step in the important direction of eliminating suicide among our kids.



Want to learn more about PPAL and family mental health?

Contact us at info@PPAL.net, or by visiting our website at PPAL.net!



Keeping Our Kids Safe: Steps to Take When a Child Expresses Suicidal Intent or is Actively Suicidal



- **Stay Calm and Listen:** Approach the child in a calm and non-judgmental manner. Encourage them to talk about their feelings and thoughts.
- **Sit Alongside Them:** Even if your child doesn't want to talk, just be with them. Show them that this is the most important thing in your life at the moment.
- **Call a Suicide/Crisis Hotline:** In Massachusetts, dialing 988 connects you someone who is trained to talk with folks experiencing suicidal ideas. Ask your child if they would like to talk with someone. You can initiate the call if it helps.
- **Seek Professional Help:** If your child has a mental health professional (therapist, counselor, NP or psychiatrist), contact them immediately for guidance and assistance.
- **Remove Access to Means:** Ensure that the child does not have access to any potential means of self-harm, such as medications, sharp objects, or firearms.
- **Stay with the Child:** Do not leave the child alone if they are in immediate danger. Stay with them until professional help arrives.
- **Crisis Care:** If the child is an immediate danger to themselves or others, seek support. Call Youth Mobile Crisis in your area for a crisis evaluation, or the Behavioral Health Help Line, which can connect you with Youth Mobile Crisis. Youth Mobile Crisis in Massachusetts is connected with the Community Behavioral Health Centers. If it is safe to do so, you may be instructed to bring your child to the CBHC for a crisis evaluation. Or, if it is safe to do so, you may be instructed to take your child to the nearest emergency department. If you can't transport your child safely, call 911 and be sure to state that you have a "MEDICAL emergency" and need an ambulance, not police.
- **Support for You:** And finally, seek support for yourself. You do not have to go through this alone! You can contact PPAL to find support from someone with lived experience, participate in support groups, attend educational workshops, and have your voice heard about improving the mental health system.



Keeping Our Kids Safe: Suicide Prevention

Warning Signs of Youth Suicide

Expressing Suicidal Thoughts or Ideation:
Verbalizing a desire to die or expressing feelings of hopelessness and despair

Lack of Interest in the Future:
A sense of purposelessness, lack of interest in the future, and a feeling of being trapped

Isolation and Withdrawal:
Social withdrawal, disconnecting from friends and family, and avoiding activities they once enjoyed

Sleep Disturbances:
Significant changes in sleep patterns, either sleeping too much or experiencing insomnia

Changes in Behavior and Mood:
Drastic changes in behavior, mood swings, agitation, irritability, or extreme sadness that seem out of character

Risk-Taking Behaviors:
Engaging in reckless behavior without concern for consequences

Giving Away Belongings:
A sudden and unexplained desire to give away personal possessions or put affairs in order

Sudden Improvement in Mood:
Paradoxically, a sudden improvement in mood after a period of depression, may indicate a decision to attempt suicide

Risk Factors for Youth Suicide

Mental Health Conditions:
Depression, anxiety disorders, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, and substance abuse disorders

Previous Suicide Attempts:
A history of prior suicide attempts increases the risk of subsequent attempts

History of Trauma or Abuse:
Physical, emotional, or sexual abuse, or other traumatic experiences in a person's life

Family History of Suicide:
A family history of suicide or suicidal behavior

Access to Means:
Easy access to lethal means such as firearms, medications, or other potentially harmful items

Isolation and Lack of Support:
Social isolation, lack of a support system, or feeling disconnected from family and friends

Bullying and Peer Pressure:
Persistent bullying, cyberbullying, or peer pressure can significantly impact a young person's mental well-being

Loss or Grief:
Recent loss of a loved one, breakup, or any other significant life event causing grief or emotional pain