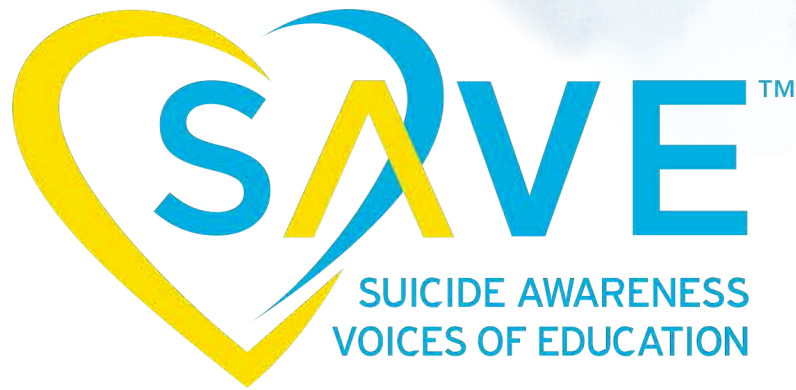


If you are in crisis, call or text 988.



PREVENTING SUICIDE

What you should know



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Educate. Advocate. Protect. Support.



Dedicated to the prevention of suicide

SAVE - Suicide Awareness Voices of Education is a national nonprofit working to end the tragedy of suicide through education and training programs, advocacy at state and national levels, lethal means safety efforts and support for suicide loss survivors.

What we do

Educate and train community members and stakeholders to identify those who may be at risk

- Distribute free educational materials
- Deliver suicide prevention awareness presentations to communities
- Develop help-seeking behaviors among students through The Green Bandana Project
- Train people and organizations through free, one-hour online suicide prevention training One Step Ahead
- Train employees and promote culture shifts in high-risk occupations like the construction industry

Advocate for people impacted by suicide at state and federal levels

- Advocate for public and private resources to support suicide prevention programs and initiatives
- Partner with and organize coalitions of advocates to pass suicide prevention policies

Protect communities by promoting lethal means safety

- Distribute free cable gun locks and other tools
- Inform about extreme risk protection orders
- Collaborate with public and private partners to secure suicide prevention barriers on tall structures

Support individuals, families, and communities after suicide loss

- Connect suicide loss survivor families through SAVE events and projects
- Honor the lives of those lost to suicide through the Named Memorial Program
- Distribute free materials on suicide grief
- Provide hope and healing through the annual Survivors of Suicide Loss Day Memorial Event and other engagement opportunities



Misconceptions of suicide

Misconception: Suicide is a selfish act.

Some people believe suicide is selfish because of the grief it causes loved ones. However, suicidal people are often driven by overwhelming emotional pain that prevents them from being fully able to consider suicide's impact on others.

Misconception: Talking about suicide encourages it.

People fear that discussing suicide could promote it. However, open conversations are critical, as they offer support, reduce stigma, and can intervene in impulsive decision-making.

Misconception: Suicide can't be prevented.

Suicide is preventable, and interventions can be effective. It's essential to provide support and resources to people in crisis and to seek professional help when needed.

Misconception: Suicide is painless.

Many suicide methods are extremely painful.

Misconception: Suicidal people just want attention.

This stereotype undermines the real emotional pain that those struggling with suicidal thoughts experience.

Misconception: Suicide is a rational option for challenging situations.

Suicide often stems from distorted thinking and hopelessness, not rational decision-making.

Misconception: Suicide always occurs without warning.

Common warning signs include:

- Preoccupation with death, violence, or dying.
- Changes in routine (eating/sleeping), risky behaviors, or giving away belongings.
- Feelings of hopelessness, saying goodbye, and withdrawal from social contacts.
- Talking about suicide or expressing despair.

Misconception: Structural barriers and safe storage of lethal means don't help.

Limiting access to lethal means, like firearms, is an effective method for reducing suicide risk. Gun locks, secured chemical storage, and structural barriers prevent suicides by intervening in suicidal impulses and extending the time in which a person can find or receive help.

Why does suicide happen?

People may contemplate suicide for a variety of complex and interconnected reasons, and it's important to recognize that each person's situation is unique. While there's no single cause for suicide, many factors are commonly linked to suicidal thoughts and behaviors. In recent years, we've learned that social determinants of health—such as socioeconomic status, education, and access to resources—play a significant role in suicide risk. These factors can influence mental health, stress, and the ability to access support, making some people more vulnerable.

Key factors include:

Mental health conditions

Depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and other disorders can create feelings of hopelessness and emotional pain.

Psychological distress

Overwhelming emotional pain or distress may make suicide seem like an escape.

Life stressors

Financial struggles, relationship problems, loss, or major life changes can increase feelings of despair.

Social isolation

Lack of support and feelings of loneliness can heighten suicide risk.

Previous suicide attempts

A history of suicide attempts increases the likelihood of future attempts.

Access to lethal means

Easy access to firearms, medications, tall structures, or other methods increases the risk of suicide.

Lack of mental health care

Limited access to mental health services or stigma around seeking help can prevent people from getting the support they need.

Family history of suicide

Family history of suicide can increase risk via genetic, environmental, or learned factors.

Substance abuse

Substance abuse can impair judgment and increase impulsivity, making people more vulnerable to suicide.

Perceived burden on others

Feeling like a burden can lead to the belief that suicide would benefit others.

Cultural and societal factors

Cultural beliefs and societal attitudes about mental health and suicide can affect whether someone seeks help.

Social determinants of health

Factors like income, education, nutrition, and access to healthcare can impact mental health and increase suicide risk.

Suicide warning signs, risk factors, and protective factors



Understanding the warning signs, risk factors, and protective factors associated with suicide is essential for identifying individuals who may be at risk.

It's important to note that suicide is a complex issue influenced by various factors, and no single factor or set of factors can predict it with absolute certainty.

Warning signs

Warning signs of suicide are observable behaviors, actions, or expressions that may indicate that someone is at risk of attempting or thinking about suicide.

- Talking about suicide, expressing thoughts like “I want to kill myself” or “I wish I were dead”
- Acquiring means to take one’s own life, like buying a gun or stockpiling pills
- Withdrawing from social contact and desiring isolation
- Experiencing mood swings, going from emotional highs to deep discouragement
- Fixating on death, dying, or violence
- Expressing feelings of being a burden to others
- Feeling trapped or hopeless in a situation
- Increasing use of alcohol or drugs
- Changing normal routine, including eating or sleeping patterns
- Engaging in risky or self-destructive behaviors, such as substance abuse or reckless driving
- Giving away possessions or organizing affairs without an apparent reason
- Saying goodbye to people with finality
- Displaying personality changes, severe anxiety, or agitation.

Risk factors

Risk factors for suicide are characteristics or circumstances that increase a person’s likelihood of experiencing suicidal thoughts or engaging in suicidal behaviors.

Having risk factors does not necessarily mean a person will attempt suicide.

- Mental health Issues - Most people who die by suicide have a diagnosed mental health condition such as depression, bipolar disorder, or schizophrenia.
- A history of prior suicide attempts
- Family history of suicide or mental health issues
- Alcohol or drug abuse
- Easy access to lethal means such as firearms
- Chronic illness or physical or emotional pain
- Social isolation or a lack of support
- Recent loss or trauma such as the death of a loved one or a job loss
- Impulsive behavior or a history of impulsive acts
- Gender - Men are more likely to die by suicide, while women are more likely to attempt suicide.

Protective factors

Protective factors are characteristics, conditions, or factors that can reduce someone’s risk of suicide.

- A strong social support network of friends and family
- Access to mental health care, treatment and support
- Effective problem-solving skills and coping strategies can help in managing stress and adversity
- Positive life changes, such as marriage or the birth of a child
- Having a sense of purpose or meaning in life
- Connectedness to a community, culture, or religious group
- Limited access to lethal means

Helping someone who is suicidal: What you can do

You can help someone who is thinking of suicide, and your support can make a significant difference in their life. Here are some steps to assist someone who may be suicidal.

Take it seriously

If someone confides in you about their suicidal thoughts or intentions, take it seriously. Avoid minimizing their feelings or telling them to "snap out of it."

Listen nonjudgmentally

Create a safe and non-judgmental space for them to talk about their feelings. Let them express their thoughts and emotions without criticism or judgment.

Show empathy and compassion

Let the person know that you care about their well-being. Show empathy and understanding by saying things like, "I'm here for you," or "I'm sorry you're feeling this way."

Ask directly about suicide

Ask the person directly if they are thinking about suicide. This can open up an honest conversation and allow them to express their feelings.

Keep them safe

If the person has a plan and access to means (e.g., pills, firearms) for suicide, try to remove or restrict access to those means. This can be a crucial step in preventing a suicide attempt.

Encourage professional help

Encourage the person to seek professional help from a mental health therapist, counselor, or psychiatrist. Offer to help them find resources and make appointments.

Offer to go with them to get support

If they are willing, offer to accompany them to their appointments or crisis helplines. Sometimes, the presence of a supportive person can make it easier for them to seek help.

Stay connected to them

Keep in touch with the person regularly, even if it's just a text or a quick check-in. Let them know you care about their well-being.

Don't promise secrecy

While you should respect their privacy, do not promise to keep their suicidal thoughts a secret if they are in immediate danger. Their safety should be the top priority.

Involve trusted people

If you're concerned about their safety, involve other trusted friends or family members who can provide support and assistance.

Know crisis support resources

Be aware of crisis helplines and hotlines in your area, such as the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (dial 988 for support). Encourage the person to call these resources if they need support.

Youth suicide prevention

Understanding the problem

- Suicide is a preventable tragedy and the second leading cause of death among youth aged 10-24 in the United States.
- More than 6,000 young lives are lost to suicide annually, highlighting the urgency of prevention efforts.

Suicide prevention strategies

Understanding these approaches can help save young lives, support youth in crisis, and foster a more compassionate society for all.

- **Talk about mental health and suicide and encourage open communication.** Don't wait for a young person to approach you. If they seem sad, anxious, depressed, or are visibly struggling, reach out to them. Ask what's wrong, listen attentively, and offer your unwavering support. Normalize conversations about mental health and suicide prevention.
- **Foster supportive and protective environments.** Build strong, positive relationships at home, school, and in the community. Ensure safe and affirming spaces and resources are available for youth at higher risk, like those who identify as LGBTQ+.
- **Take a suicide prevention training.** All adults such as educators, coaches, and parents can equip themselves with the skills to recognize warning signs and know how to support someone who is at-risk of suicide.
- **Encourage and talk openly about healthy behaviors.** Talk to young people about the risks of spending too much time alone and excessive use of social media and work together on ways to enjoy both in moderation. Encourage young people to get adequate sleep, eat well, and engage in exercise.
- **Support treatment and professional help.** Ensure youth have access to counseling, therapy, and crisis intervention services. Provide support and encouragement to stick to a treatment plan.
- **Limit or completely remove access to lethal means.** Safely store firearms outside the home or in a secure place, discard old medications, and dispose of other potentially dangerous items.
- **Pay attention.** Listen to young people and notice changes in behavior. Always take a threat of suicide seriously.

SUPPORT RESOURCES

988 SUICIDE AND CRISIS LIFELINE

The most comprehensive source of information about local resources and services in the country

Call or text 988 | 988lifeline.org

SAMHSA TREATMENT LOCATOR

Confidential and anonymous resource for people seeking treatment for mental and substance use disorders in the US and its territories

Call 1-833-888-1553 | findtreatment.gov

Youth suicide prevention

Recognizing the warning signs

Warning signs of suicide are indicators that suggest someone may be thinking about or planning to take their own life and often serve as red flags that a person is in crisis and may need immediate support or intervention.

Warning signs may include:

- Talking or writing about suicide. For example, making statements such as "I'm going to kill myself," or "I won't be a problem for you much longer"
- Increasing use of alcohol or drugs
- Feeling trapped, hopeless or helpless about a situation
- Doing risky or self-destructive things
- Giving away personal items for no clear, logical reason

Other warning signs might seem like typical youth behavior:

- Changing normal routine, like eating or sleeping patterns
- Becoming less social and wanting to be alone
- Having mood swings



Taking action

Remember, if you notice the warning signs in someone you know, it's important to reach out with compassion, listen without judgment, and encourage them to seek professional help. ***If you're worried that a young person may harm themselves or someone else right now, call 911.*** Otherwise, you can follow these four simple steps:

- 1. Ask:** Ask directly if they are thinking about suicide.
- 2. Listen:** Show empathy, listen actively, and avoid judgment.
- 3. Respond:** Encourage them to seek help and connect them with resources.
- 4. Follow up:** Connect with the person within 24-48 hours after a crisis.

Every young life holds value, and each one of us has the power to make a difference. Recognizing the signs of distress and taking action—whether through a conversation, a referral to support services, or simply showing up with compassion—can be lifesaving. Preventing youth suicide starts with awareness and continues with courage, connection, and care.

The complexity of suicide loss

Suicide grief is often described as more complex, intense, and prolonged because it comes with layers of emotions and unanswered questions that other losses may not.

Challenges of suicide loss

Suicide loss is uniquely complex due to the emotional, psychological, and social challenges it brings. Unlike deaths from illness, which often allow for some level of preparation, suicide is often sudden and unexpected, leaving survivors in shock and confusion. This abruptness can create a sense of unresolved grief, with survivors wondering if there were signs they missed that might have prevented the loss.

Potential feelings of guilt and responsibility

Often, one of the most difficult aspects of suicide grief is the mix of guilt and perceived responsibility survivors feel. Survivors frequently wonder if they could have done more to prevent the death — whether they missed warning signs or failed to intervene in time — which can trigger feelings of guilt, often intensified by unanswered questions about the person's mental state or reasoning. Survivors should be reassured that they are not obligated to have prevented the loss. The guilt they feel is a natural, but ultimately unfair, part of the grieving process.

Potential feelings of anger and betrayal

Suicide can feel like an act of abandonment. For those who loved the person, there may be intense feelings of anger or betrayal, which can be difficult to reconcile with the grief they're experiencing. In some cases, people may feel that the person who died by suicide chose to escape pain in a way that left the loved ones behind to deal with it. This creates a complex emotional landscape where grief is layered with anger, confusion, and sometimes even resentment.

Social stigma and isolation

The social stigma surrounding suicide can contribute to the complexity of the grieving process. Although suicide stigma is decreasing, many people are uncomfortable discussing suicide due to cultural or religious taboos, which can leave survivors feeling isolated and misunderstood. When others don't know how to talk about the loss or what to say, survivors can feel further alienated or unsupported in their grief. Isolation often magnifies a person's pain.

Unanswered questions in grief

Lastly, suicide leaves survivors with many "what if" scenarios they may not consider with other types of death. Lacking understanding about the complex factors at play before their death often leads to these unresolved questions, further complicating the grieving process. A suicide death can feel incomplete—when there is no full understanding of why it happened, uncertainty can make it harder to find peace with the loss.

Supporting someone after a suicide loss

When someone experiences the devastating loss of a loved one to suicide, knowing what to say or do can be challenging. It's important to approach a grieving person with empathy, sensitivity, and understanding while acknowledging the complex emotions they may be facing.

Communicating in the immediate aftermath

When approaching someone grieving a suicide loss, sensitivity is key. The most important approach is offering genuine, non-judgmental support while respecting their grief. Simple phrases like “I’m so sorry for your loss” and “I’m here to listen” show empathy and let them know you’re there. Here are some examples of how you can offer support effectively:

Acknowledge their pain by simply being there

Use phrases like *“I’m so sorry for your loss,”* or *“I can’t imagine how hard this must be.”*

Offer specific help

Instead of *“Let me know if you need anything,”* say *“I can bring dinner,”* or *“I will help with errands.”*

Check in regularly

After the funeral, continue to check in with *“I’m thinking of you,”* or *“I’m here if you need to talk.”*

Encourage professional help

Suggest professional therapy, counseling, or peer support groups.

Honor their loved one’s memory

Ask, *“What are your favorite memories of [loved one]?”*

Avoid blame or judgment

Never say the deceased was “selfish.” Offer compassion, like, *“I know this is incredibly hard.”*

Be patient and respect silence

Give them space and offer *“I’m here if you want to talk or just need quiet company.”*

Recognize grief is nonlinear

Let them know it’s ok to feel a range of emotions, saying, *“I’m here for you wherever you are in this journey.”*

Offer long-term support

Regularly check in with *“I’m still thinking of you,”* or *“If you need someone to talk to, I’m here.”*

Supporting someone after a suicide loss

Avoiding harmful phrases

Although well-meaning, some comments can cause more harm than good. Consider avoiding the following statements when supporting someone after a suicide loss:

"Everything happens for a reason," or "It's all part of the bigger picture."

These phrases can feel dismissive or like the speaker is rationalizing a profoundly painful event. They can be hard for someone in pain to hear, as they fail to acknowledge the unfairness of the loss or fail to provide comfort or understanding.

"They're in a better place," or "It was their choice."

These can feel like the speaker is finding a positive or silver lining in the trauma of suicide loss. Saying suicide is someone's choice ignores the complexity of suicide.

"You're strong enough to handle this," or "You're so strong."

While meant to reassure or compliment, these statements can feel isolating or pressuring, implying that the person should constantly appear strong or handle their hardship better, even when they are struggling deeply.

"At least you have [family, health, etc]."

This can minimize the person's pain by suggesting that there are things they should be grateful for, even when they're experiencing immense suffering.

"I know how you feel."

Even if someone has gone through something similar, this statement can feel invalidating to the person suffering. Everyone's pain is unique, and assuming you know exactly what someone is going through can feel dismissive.

"Time heals all wounds."

While time can bring healing, this phrase can be dismissive of the real, ongoing pain someone might be feeling. It also suggests there's a standard timeline for healing, which does not exist.

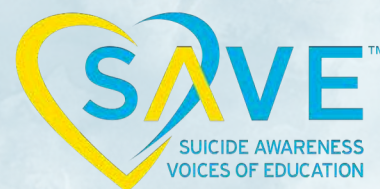
"[Name] committed suicide."

The word "committed" is stigmatizing and implies a crime. Use person-centered, sensitive language and say "(Name) died by suicide."

Acknowledging holidays and special dates

Holidays, anniversaries, and birthdays can be hard for people grieving a suicide loss and can bring painful memories. Extra support during these times is crucial. Sharing positive memories of the loved one can offer healing. Added self-care and reflection can also help manage complex feelings.

RESOURCES



988 SUICIDE AND CRISIS LIFELINE

Provides 24/7, free and confidential support for people in distress, prevention and crisis resources for you or your loved ones, and best practices for professionals in the US
[Call or text 988](tel:988) | 988lifeline.org
[Para acceder al apoyo en español, marque 988 y presione 2.](#)

VETERANS CRISIS LINE

Find veteran-specific care, learn about treatment and benefits and find resources for caregivers
[Dial 988 and press 1 or text 838255](tel:988) veteranscrisisline.net

ESPAÑOL

Lifeline está disponible para todos, es gratuito y confidencial.
[Llame a 988 y marca numero 2 o texto envía "AYUDA" al 988](#)

LGBTQIA+ YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS

LGBTQIA+ people under 25 can access 24/7 LGBTQIA+ support via the 988 Lifeline.
[Dial 988 and press 3 or text PRIDE to 988.](#)

FIND LOCAL SUPPORT

211

The most comprehensive source of information about local resources and services in the country | [Call 211 or text your local ZIP code to 898-211](tel:211) | 211.org

SAMHSA TREATMENT LOCATOR

Confidential and anonymous resource for people seeking treatment for mental and substance use disorders in the US and its territories
[Call 1-833-888-1553](tel:18338881553) | findtreatment.gov



INFORMATION + PROGRAMS

SAVE

Suicide prevention educational programs, training, grief support, advocacy, resources and opportunities to raise awareness of suicide | save.org

THE TREVOR PROJECT

Offers 24/7 crisis counseling and a variety of resources to support LGBTQIA+ people and their loved ones | [Text 678-678](tel:678678) thetrevorproject.org

SUICIDE PREVENTION RESOURCE CENTER

Offers consultation, training and resources for suicide prevention | SPRC.org

ENGAGE WITH SAVE



Donate at
save.org/donate.



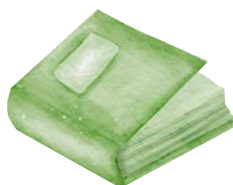
Take our 40-minute
One Step Ahead training at
save.org/one-step-ahead.



Learn more about advocacy
and policies to prevent
suicide at save.org/advocacy.



Get the newsletter at
save.org/newsletter.



Learn about our peer-to-peer
student support program
The Green Bandana Project at
thegreenbandanaproject.org.



Start a Named Memorial
page for your loved one
at save.org/named-memorial-program.



Host or attend a suicide
prevention event. Find our
calendar at save.org/events.



Email bsenser@save.org to assist
SAVE's LOSS (Local Outreach
to Suicide Survivors) Teams
as an advisor or volunteer.



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with your network.

