



# Frequently Asked Questions in Suicide Prevention

**Disclaimer:** *This information is for educational purposes only and is not therapeutic advice nor a substitute for therapy. It should not be used to diagnose or treat any mental health problem. If you are located within the United States and you need emergency assistance please call 988 or go to your nearest emergency room. If you are located within Colorado you may also call the Colorado Crisis Line at 844-493-TALK (8255).*

## WHAT IF SUICIDE HAPPENS AGAIN WITHIN OUR COMMUNITY?

That may happen. If and when that happens, our goal is to give resources and support to the survivors. You have the right to be concerned as each suicide impacts, at minimum, 135 people. But, when we provide support to survivors of suicide, we are also opening up healthy conversation about suicide and its impact, which may help us prevent further suicides in our community.

## IN RESPONSE TO SUICIDE, WHAT IF I CAN'T HANDLE IT?

It's understandable that you would feel that way. Everyone is afraid of suicide and responding to it can feel terrifying. But you don't have to handle it perfectly for yourself or anyone else. The point is to be authentic and compassionate and continue these hard conversations. Be aware of what you are comfortable with and prepared for, be gentle with yourself and take it in small steps. We all want to put our capes on and save lives. Recognizing the urge in yourself as well as the fear are the first steps in holding boundaries and compassion together.

## HOW IS TECHNOLOGY CONTRIBUTING TO RISING RISKS OF SUICIDE?

Technology is moving so fast, we can barely keep up! There is new research coming out all the time but the one thing we know so far is that 3 or more hours of social media a day increases risk for suicide. On the other hand, social media and technology apps can make access to support around suicide faster and easier to obtain. The point is not to reject technology or social media all together, but to limit its use and focus on meaningful connections and helpful resources.

## WHAT'S HAPPENING TO OUR YOUNGEST GENERATION THAT IS PUTTING THEM AT GREATER RISK FOR SUICIDE?

There is a combination of factors we are tracking in youth, including perfectionism, pressure, lack of social connection, and social media use leading to an unrealistic perspective of success and how they compare themselves to their peers. Fortunately, there are some things we can do that can combat these trends. Most significantly, research tells us that having meaningful connection with even one supportive adult can make a tremendous difference.

This is particularly true for youth in the LGBTQ+ population. Our goal is to actively look for ways to help this generation make meaningful connections. It's not a one and done, it's complicated. And we need to continue to explore what we can do to support this generation.

## WHAT IF THE PERSON WHO DIED BY SUICIDE DIDN'T SHOW ANY WARNING SIGNS?

It's a common experience for individuals to feel like there were not any signs or they missed them. Often, that's because, no one person has access to seeing all of the signs that might be there. A student may not share things with their parents. A teacher or a coach may notice things that a best friend didn't. This is why we have to respond to the threat of suicide as a community and surround our youth with a culture of support. Missing warning signs adds to our fears and yet, suicide is preventable. A person who doesn't show any signs at all is the exception or outlier. Most people who die by suicide have experienced extreme pain for days, weeks, or months. Our goal is not to look for signs of suicidality, but to look for signs of pain and disconnection and see what we can do to repair the hurt and regain hope.

## WON'T ASKING A PERSON ABOUT SUICIDE GIVE THEM THE IDEA?

No. Research shows that asking about suicide when the person is having thoughts of suicide actually brings them relief in being able to talk about it.

## WHAT COULD I SAY OR DO THAT WOULD MAKE IT WORSE FOR SOMEONE WHO IS EXPERIENCING SUICIDAL THOUGHTS?

Yes but you don't need to worry. The wrong things to say are easy to avoid. Be sure that you are not minimizing, shaming, blaming, or catastrophizing and instead, you are listening deeply and letting the other person know that you care about their experience. It's fear that makes us say the thing we shouldn't. If you start by courageously listening and expressing empathy before you try to move to next steps or solutions, you will naturally find the flow of the conversation that supports the person without making it feel worse for them.

## WHAT DO I SAY TO A PERSON WHEN I'M UNCOMFORTABLE TALKING ABOUT SUICIDE?

If you aren't comfortable having the conversation about suicide, find someone who can help! It's okay to share how you feel and authentically own it. Ironically, it can help the person much more if you are honest. Being truthful and authentic will serve the person suffering much more than having your body language not match your words of reassurance. Simply be sure to let them know that you care about them, and are not judging their experience but rather, are owning that your own experience is making you uncomfortable and talking to someone else would be more supportive for both of you.

## AS A FRIEND OR COMMUNITY MEMBER, HOW CAN I HELP SOMEONE WHO IS THINKING OF SUICIDE?

Knowing that suicide is more about pain than death can help each of us sit with someone we care about to explore that pain, develop compassion, and help them

access life-saving resources. There are professional resources, social resources, and internal resources to support someone experiencing suicide. Professional resources would be mental health supports, the national hotline, the text line, and more. Social resources include community support where we can also engage other people to support the person who is suffering. Internal resources would be the person finding things that they live for and help them cope. The best conversation isn't one conversation, but to have many conversations to compassionately listen and help the person access any or all of these resources as needed.

## WHY ARE MENTAL HEALTH AND SUICIDE RATES ON THE RISE?

There are more stressors and risk factors now than ever before. Each person has a way of responding to stressors in their lives, with technology, isolation, and other risk factors impacting the rising rates of anxiety, depression, and suicide. Our goal is to combat these stressors by continuing healthy conversations and consciously creating a culture of courageous connections.

