

OPERATION SNOWBALL & CGTI

SUICIDE PREVENTION INFORMATIONAL GUIDE

Understanding and Addressing Mental Health Crises in
Our Communities

cebrin goodman
teen institute

OPERATION
SNOWBALL

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INTRODUCTION

This guide was created with the purpose of walking any reader through the basics of suicide awareness and prevention.

Suicide remains the second leading cause of death for adolescents and adults ages 10 - 34. This is not the only disheartening and startling statistics that pairs with the crisis of suicide.

Through this guide we hope to spread more information about the challenges and crises of mental health and suicide with the hope and intention that by educating others, we can save lives. Though the conversation around suicide is often times intimidating, we know it needs to be had.

This guide will go through the basics of mental health, crisis response, the statistics of suicide across Illinois and more.

If you receive anything from this guide, we hope it's this:
[You are not alone. We want you here.](#)

THE BASICS

Let's start from the beginning: What is suicide and why does it happen?

Suicide is the taking of one's own life purposefully. Anyone can be at risk for suicide, but experiencing depression, trauma, substance addiction, violence or abuse, other mental health challenges and related hardships can contribute. These contributing issues are called "risk factors."

Having a risk factor in your life does not automatically mean that suicide or thoughts of suicide are likely or will happen. It can be tough to determine if someone is having suicidal thoughts. This is why it is also important to understand the "warning signs" of suicide.

There are many warning signs that someone may exhibit if they are having thoughts of suicide, though they may not always be easy to see.

Warning signs include:

- drastic change in appearance
- drastic switch in mood, positive or negative
- feeling lost, hopeless and alone
- self-isolation
- withdrawing from social life
- putting affairs in order and saying goodbye
- taking unhealthy risks
- acting anxious/agitated
- giving away possessions
- expressing shame & guilt
- changing habits
- talking about suicide
- feeling unbearable pain
- using substances

THE BASICS, CTD.

It's important to state here that missing warning signs is no one individual's fault. They are not always shown to every person at all times. But knowing what to look for and learning those key indicators can save a life!

Additionally, it's important to build up "protective factors." Protective factors are the opposite of risk factors - they mitigate or eliminate the harmful effects of stress, mental health challenges, trauma, etc.

Building up protective factors individually, in your families, or in your schools, organizations and communities can help both youth and adults feel supported, cared for, protected and healthy.

Protective factors, just like risk factors, do not specifically determine whether or not someone will experience thoughts of suicide. However, having these protective factors in place can make a difference!

Protective Factors Include:

- strong relationships/community
- supportive care providers
- physical activity
- healthy nutrition
- social activities
- adequate sleep
- healthy living environment
- healthy school or work environment
- supportive family
- coping and problem solving skills
- opportunities for learning & growth
- good communication

TALKING ABOUT SUICIDE

As this guide works through the in's and out's of understanding the crisis of suicide, it's paramount that we talk about the language used in that discussion.

First and foremost, it's important to always use person-first language. This means never referring to someone based on their mental health challenge/crisis or diagnosis. For instance, you would never say "a depressed person" - you would say "a person experiencing depression/a mental health challenge."

Using this specific language helps establish that diagnoses and challenges/crises do not define people. People are multifaceted, detailed and at all times so many wonderful things. By putting the emphasis on the struggles they experience, we can downplay who they are, what they do and what they are capable of!

Along with this, we also must focus on our suicide-related language specifically.

There are two phrases to work on eliminating from the general vocabulary - "committed suicide" and "successful/failed suicide."

The word committed comes with many negative connotations - committed a crime, committed a sin, be committed. By changing our language to "died by suicide," we can show more compassion to those who have struggled with this crisis. Furthermore, by eliminating the words successful or failed, we can show compassion for the lives at stake instead of implying that the loss of life is a good thing.

Changing your language isn't easy - it takes work, time and practice. It's okay to make mistakes and to correct them! By allowing ourselves the time to learn and the chance to explain our intentions, we can show empathy, understanding and kindness.

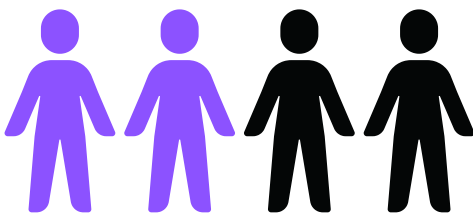
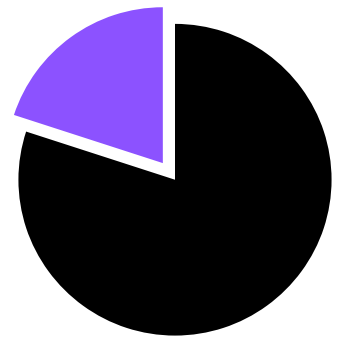
THE STATISTICS

Below you'll find more general information about the crisis of suicide - by knowing the prevalence of suicide in our communities, we can do better to prevent it, support our peers and encourage better education, care and more.

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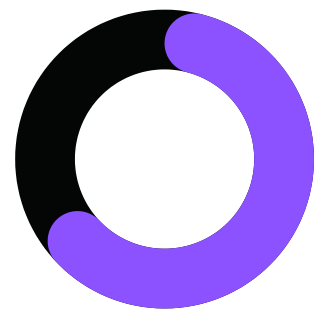
The percent rate of increase in suicides between 1999 and 2019. (CDC)

Suicide was the 10th leading cause of death in 2019 and the 12th leading cause of death in Illinois specifically in 2020. (NIMH/AFSP)



In 2018, 1.4 million adults made at least one suicide attempt. (AFSP)

76.7% of communities in Illinois did not have enough mental health services in 2020. (AFSP)



These stats can be broken down further by community, gender, race, socio-economic groups and more.

HOW CAN WE HELP?

Looking at the statistics and information we have, it's clear that we need to take action and make sure we're supporting the many incredible people in our communities.

So, what can we do?

First things first: If you believe someone in your life is contemplating suicide, **reach out and ask directly**. Never assume that warning signs displayed are a joke.

MYTH BUST: Asking someone directly if they are thinking about suicide will not put the idea in their head. It is statistically the most effective conversation you can have!

If someone says yes, discloses any plans or details - **CALL FOR HELP**. Provide first responders with whatever details you can (substances, firearms, etc.) so they can assist effectively.

If you do not feel safe calling the providers in your area, find a trusted adult or contact the two 24/7 numbers below for assistance. Do not leave your peer alone.

National Suicide Prevention Hotline - (800) 273 - 8255

Crisis Text Line - 741741

HOW CAN WE HELP?

Other things we can do to prevent and educate on the crisis of suicide:

- Talk to friends and family about mental health
- Learn the resources and providers in your community
- Work with administrators and organizations to increase mental health education and resources provided in schools
- Work with local officials to increase mental health policies
- Work with community organizers to push for more accessible providers, facilities and resources in your community
- Talk to local businesses and organizations about mental health-related events and observances and what they can do to spread accurate and helpful information
- Follow and share information from trusted accounts that discuss mental health information, policy, resources and more
- Attend or host trainings, webinars or assemblies with trusted providers, officials and mental health specialists
- Host or attend events where mental health and suicide information is shared
- **Let the people in your life know that they matter and that they belong here!**

RESOURCES

National Suicide Prevention Hotline - (800) 273 - 8255

Crisis Text Line - 741741

Online Crisis Chat - [SuicidePreventionLifeline.org](https://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org)

The Trevor Project (LGBTQ+) - (866) 488 - 7386

The Trevor Project Text Line - 678678

Trevor Project Chat Line - [TheTrevorProject.Org/get-help-now](https://www.thetrevorproject.org/get-help-now)

National Suicide Prevention Hotline (Spanish) - (888) 628 - 9454

National Suicide Prevention Hotline (Deaf/Hard of Hearing)

- (800) 799 - 4889

[Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#)

[American Foundation for Suicide Prevention](#)

[Suicide Prevention Resource Center](#)

[National Institute of Mental Health](#)

[National Alliance on Mental Health](#)

[Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#)

PREVENTION IN SCHOOLS, ORGANIZATIONS & COMMUNITIES

Bringing suicide prevention to schools and communities as early and efficiently as possible can save lives and spread accurate, helpful information to those who need it! Below you'll find a list of programs for both youth and adults that assist in or provide education and prevention!

Mental Health First Aid - Classes are available through the National Council for Mental Wellbeing for adults working with adults, adults working with youth and youth assisting their peers/themselves.

More Than Sad - Programs and materials for students, teachers and parents on understanding mental health are available through AFSP.

It's Real - This film and guide support learning about mental health for college-aged students, provided by AFSP.

Model School District Policy on Suicide Prevention - This program provides districts & administrations a comprehensive overview of implementing suicide prevention policies, provided by AFSP.

The Cebrin Goodman Teen Institute and Operation Snowball - These prevention programs work in tandem to provide middle and high school youth with mental health and suicide prevention education while also giving them the tools to implement their own plans for positive change in their communities.

SOURCES

This guide was made with information and resources from the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP), the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), The Suicide Prevention Lifeline and the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) by staff from the Illinois Association for Behavioral Health.

This guide serves as a basic introduction to resources and information on suicide and suicide prevention and does not include all information and statistics surrounding this topic.

Any one looking for more information should use the provided links, websites and organizations included in the packet. Statistics included are subject to change with passage of time.