

Employee Frontline

September/October 2021 A newsletter from the Washington State Employee Assistance Program

September is Suicide Prevention Month: You Can Be the One to Help

(Sources include these websites: BeThe1To.com, [Suicide Prevention Resource Center](http://SuicidePreventionResourceCenter.org), [American Foundation for Suicide Prevention](http://AmericanFoundationforSuicidePrevention.org), [National Institute of Mental Health \(NIMH\)](http://NationalInstituteofMentalHealth.gov), and [National Alliance for Mental Illness \(NAMI\)](http://NationalAllianceforMentalIllness.org))

September is **National Suicide Prevention and Awareness Month**, a time to increase our commitment to engage with our families, friends, co-workers, classmates, neighbors, and others about mental health and emotional struggles in a meaningful way, in order to reduce stigma. Unfortunately, negative attitudes and beliefs toward people who have a mental health condition are common. In this time of great uncertainty and stress, it is more important than ever to raise awareness about suicide and to be there for one another.



If you or someone else is at immediate risk of suicide, please don't wait -- contact 911, call [the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](http://theNationalSuicidePreventionLifeline.org) at 1-800-273-8255, or text HOME to [the Crisis Text Line](http://theCrisisTextLine.org) at 741741

[Key statistics](#) about suicide include:

- Suicide is the **2nd** leading cause of death for people ages 10 to 34
- The overall suicide rate has increased **35%** since 1999
- In the U.S., suicide is the **10th** leading cause of death, with **130** suicides per day on average
- In Washington State, suicide is the **8th** leading cause of death, and the suicide rate is higher than the national average
- **78%** of all people who die by suicide are male
- For American Indian and Alaska Native women and men, since 1999 the suicide rate has [increased by 139% and 71%](#) respectively
- Black children younger than 13 die at nearly [2x the rate of white children](#)
- Suicide is [the leading cause of death](#) for Asian Americans ages 15-24
- Lesbian, gay and bisexual youth are **4x** more likely to attempt suicide than straight youth
- Transgender people are **12x** more likely to attempt suicide than the general population

During the COVID pandemic, while [one study](#) of suicide data from 21 countries indicated that suicide rates did not increase during the early months of the pandemic, [CDC data](#) from February-March 2021 has shown a sharp uptick in suspected suicide attempts among teenage girls in the U.S. Data from previous epidemics suggest that suicide rates may initially appear to decrease during epidemics but may increase thereafter.

As you review the [signs that someone may be considering suicide](#), know that many of these signs may be harder to see during times of physical distancing. Changes in routine especially will not be as apparent, but there are other things you can look for:

- Changes in tone, language, and time of day when texting, talking, or posting online
- Do they answer your calls and respond to your texts?
- Changes in the frequency (more or less) and content of what they might be sharing online or if they share media links with you
- In addition to the above, if there is a change in energy levels or appetite; increased use of drugs or alcohol; mood swings; trouble sleeping or relaxing; frequent headaches, stomachaches, or body pains; heightened worry or anxiety; and inability to feel pleasure, it could be a reason to check in.

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If you think someone might be considering suicide, take these [5 action steps](#) (from the [#BeThe1To method](#)):

- **Ask** – When someone you know is in emotional pain, ask them directly: “*Are you thinking about killing yourself?*” It’s not an easy question but don’t be afraid to ask. During times of physical distancing, pay special attention to people you know already struggle or have struggled in the past with emotional distress. Make sure to reach out more frequently to talk and check in – don’t wait for you them to come to you to ask for help or connection.

Why is this important? Studies show that [asking at-risk individuals](#) if they are suicidal does **NOT** increase suicides or suicidal thoughts. In fact, studies suggest the opposite: [acknowledging and talking about suicide](#) may in fact [reduce rather than increase suicidal thoughts](#).

- **Be There** – If someone you care about is thinking about suicide, listen carefully to their reasons for feeling hopeless and in pain. Listen without judgment and with compassion and empathy. When you can’t be physically present, there are still many other ways to be there for someone, including speaking with them on the phone, via text or through an online platform. The important things to keep in mind when maintaining social connection while physically apart are the regularity and quality of the connection:
 - Establish the frequency with which the person would like you to check in with them, and stick to that schedule
 - When talking by phone or virtually, be fully present – remove any distractions so you can focus on your conversation.

Why is this important? Being there for someone with thoughts of suicide is life-saving, by increasing someone’s [connectedness](#) to others and limiting their isolation. Individuals are more likely to feel less depressed, less suicidal, less overwhelmed, and more hopeful after speaking to someone who listens without judgment.

- **Keep Them Safe** – If your loved one is thinking about suicide, ask if they’ve also thought about how they would do it. Separate them from anything they are thinking of using to hurt themselves. When you’re physically distant, the same principles of putting time and space between the person and lethal means still apply. You can use the following questions/prompts to encourage the person to distance themselves
 - If the person has access to their means, have an honest conversation with them about what they could do to make it harder for them to access those means in a crisis, when they might be more inclined to act impulsively.
 - If the person has the means in hand while you are talking to them, ask if they could put it away while you talk. Call [the Lifeline](#) together.
 - After you talk, ask the person to think about the overall safety of their environment: is there anything else in their home, like firearms, that should be protected against to put more time and space between them and the potential means, even if those means weren’t the person’s first intended plan?

Why is this important? [A number of studies](#) have shown that when lethal means are made less available or less deadly, suicide rates by that method decline **and** frequently suicide rates overall decline.

- **Help Them Connect** – Help someone with thoughts of suicide connect with ongoing supports to help them establish a support system so they have others to reach out to for help, whether it’s family, friends, co-workers, clergy, coaches or therapists – via phone, text or virtually when physical distancing is necessary. Two crisis resources that are always available: the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255) and the Crisis Text Line at 741741.

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- **Follow Up** – Check in the person you care about on a regular basis. Leave a message, send a text, or give them a call. Making contact with your loved one in the days and weeks after a crisis can make a difference in keeping them alive. During times of physical distancing, setting aside a time and date that you will follow up can provide something to look forward to and sends the message that you care.

Why is this important? Studies have shown that brief, low cost intervention, [following up](#) and [supportive, ongoing contact](#) may be an important part of suicide prevention, especially for individuals after they have been discharged from hospitals or care services.

Here are some additional resources to consider:

- Check out EAP's [Suicide Awareness and Prevention Resource Guide](#), including links to our comprehensive [Suicide Prevention and Intervention Resources page](#), general information about [suicide prevention in the workplace](#), and specific info about [the role of co-workers in preventing suicide](#)
- Wondering how to start a conversation about tough topics like mental health and suicide? Get some tools and tips with these two resources: [Have a #RealConvo](#) and [Seize the Awkward](#)
- Take advantage of these free suicide prevention training opportunities:
 - [Attend](#) a free virtual live suicide prevention presentation, [Talk Saves Lives](#), offered by the [American Foundation for Suicide Prevention](#) -- includes versions that focus on supporting [the LGBTQ+ community](#) and [seniors](#)
 - On [World Suicide Prevention Day, September 10th](#), [attend](#) a free virtual live suicide prevention training based on the [QPR model \(Question, Persuade, Refer\)](#) – [Friday, 9/10 from 11am to 1pm](#)
 - [Watch](#) a prerecorded LEARN Saves Lives suicide prevention presentation, teaching [the LEARN model](#), offered by the [University of Washington's Forefront Suicide Prevention Center](#)
- Depression may not look like what you've imagined: [watch](#) this short video about feeling depressed and how to know when to get help
- Visit this [Virtual Calming Room](#) tailored to students, teachers, and caring adults to find tools and strategies for managing emotions and building resiliency.
- Add some hope and inspiration to your day by [reading and listening to stories](#) of suicide attempt survivors
- [Take a quick online mental health screening test](#) to help determine whether you are experiencing symptoms of a mental health condition.
- While you are supporting and helping someone who may be in crisis, it is especially important for you to also [take care of yourself](#).

And, if you're feeling stuck or overwhelmed, or you could use some support, please don't hesitate to [reach out to EAP](#): call us at 1-877-313-4455 or contact us [online](#).

Orientation to the Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

Presented by: Kari Uhlman, MA, LMHC- EAP Counselor

Wednesday, September 22, 2021

10:00 a.m. - 10:30 a.m.

[Click to Register.](#)



Tuesday, October 19, 2021

9:00 a.m. - 9:30 a.m.

[Click to Register](#)