



RTS/C

Responding to Suicide with Compassion

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Words Matter

Discouraged

considering, contemplating,
thinking about suicide

unsuccessful or failed attempt

successful or completed suicide,
committed suicide, killed oneself

suicide threat, suicide gesture

making jokes about suicide

using suicidal statements to express frustration, despair, anger

Preferred

have thoughts of suicide

attempted suicide

died of suicide, took one's own life

suicidal behavior

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Your Role

You are expected to:

- provide support and validation, or refer to someone who can
- provide resources and referrals, or refer to someone who can

You are not expected to:

- solve someone's problems
- make sure someone is happy and well
- prevent someone's suicide attempt or death

Suicide is preventable, but it is not predictable.

A suicide death is not your fault!

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Compassion

noun

a feeling of deep sympathy and sorrow for another who is stricken by misfortune, accompanied by a strong desire to alleviate the suffering

"If help is harmful, then it's not help."
-Kelechi Ubozoh

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2019 Youth Behavior Risk Survey - Illinois

| | All Youth | All Girls | All Boys | All White Youth | White Girls | White Boys | All Black Youth | Black Girls | Black Boys | All Latinx Youth | Latina Girls | Latino Boys | All Asian Youth |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|----------|-----------------|-------------|------------|-----------------|-------------|------------|------------------|--------------|-------------|-----------------|
| Felt sad or hopeless that they stopped doing usual activities | 36.3 | 46.0 | 26.8 | 34.5 | 45.6 | 23.2 | 38.0 | 49.1 | 27.6 | 40.7 | 47.5 | 34.2 | 25.3 |
| Seriously considered attempting suicide | 19.0 | 23.7 | 13.9 | 18.9 | 23.2 | 14.3 | 20.8 | 28.4 | 13.4 | 17.3 | 21.6 | 13.1 | 15.4 |
| Made a plan about how they would attempt suicide | 15.6 | 19.0 | 12.1 | 14.4 | 18.5 | 10.1 | 18.8 | 24.7 | 13.0 | 14.9 | 15.4 | 14.3 | 15.2 |
| Attempted suicide | 9.0 | 9.3 | 8.4 | 6.7 | 8.1 | 5.2 | 14.0 | 12.1 | 15.6 | 11.6 | 11.2 | 11.9 | 6.2 |
| Suicide attempt resulted in an injury that needed medical treatment | 3.1 | 2.8 | 3.2 | 2.1 | 2.0 | 2.2 | 5.6 | 4.0 | 7.0 | 4.5 | 4.4 | 4.5 | 2.4 |

www.cdc.gov/healthyouth/data/yrbs/index.htm

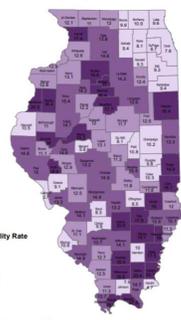
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Suicide in Illinois

based on 2018 CDC Data

- 1488 total deaths
- 132 deaths of youth age 10-19
- 47,000 youth report attempting suicide
- For every death, there are an estimated 25-200 attempts.
- Rate in rural counties 2x rate in Chicago area

All Ages Suicide Mortality Rate by County, Illinois, 2008-2017



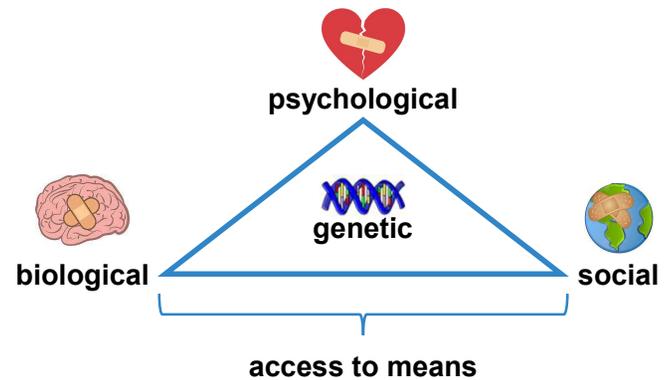
Data Source: Illinois Department of Public Health, Center for Health Statistics, Vital Records, 2008-2017. Age-adjusted rate per 100,000 using the U.S. 2000 standard population. Created: June 2019.

Champaign County (2008-2017): 199 suicides

www.dph.illinois.gov/topics-services/prevention-wellness/suicide-prevention

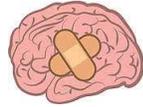
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Pathways to Suicide



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Biological: Brain Function



46% of people who died by suicide had a diagnosed mental illness
*This does not mean that mental illness caused their suicide

- Mood disorders (Depression, Bipolar Disorder)
 - Anxiety disorders
 - Trauma & Stress disorders (PTSD)
 - Eating disorders
 - Substance Use disorders
 - Psychotic disorders (Schizophrenia)
 - Neurodevelopmental disorders (Autism, ADHD, Conduct Disorder)
- Symptoms of mental illness are similar to symptoms of trauma
➤ Neurobiology of trauma (3rd variable problem)

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Psychological: Inner Conflict



➤ Thoughts, feelings, and beliefs about ourselves and our place in the world

- ability to perform roles
- ability to meet expectations
- moral dilemmas (moral injury)
- shame, guilt, humiliation

➤ May include cognitive distortions - perceptions don't always match reality

- ❖ **Thwarted belongingness**
- ❖ **Perceived burdensomeness**

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Social: Crisis

- Refers not to the precipitating event, but to the person's reaction to the event
- Occurs when stress or emotions exceed a person's ability to cope
- Can develop from a single stressful incident or repeated exposure to stress
- Suicidal thoughts can occur any time someone is in crisis, even in the absence of mental illness

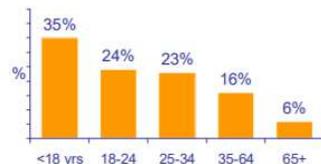


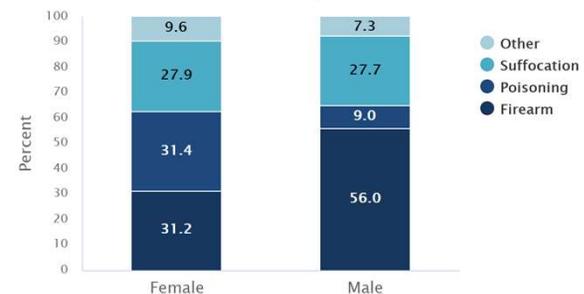
FIGURE 3. % of suicides occurring within 24 hours of a crisis, by age group

www.sprc.org/sites/default/files/migrate/library/YouthSuicideFactSheet.pdf

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Percentage of Suicide Deaths by Method in the United States (2017)

Data Courtesy of CDC

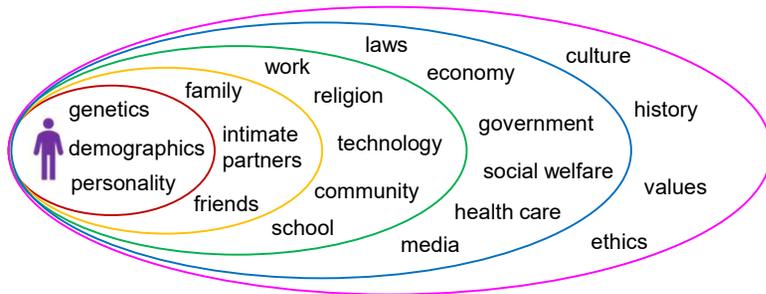


- About 51% of suicides in 10-24 year-olds are by firearm
- 82% of these guns belonged to a family member, usually a parent
- 2/3 of them were stored unlocked

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Suicide is Complex

There is no single cause for suicide!



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Protective Factors

- coping skills
- problem-solving skills
- connectedness, belongingness
- social support
- acceptance, affirmation
- sense of purpose
- feelings of success
- community services and supports
- economic stability and social welfare
- public policy
- cultural beliefs

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Risk Factors

- stress, crisis, trauma:
 - discrimination/oppression, relationship issues, academic stress, job stress, job loss, financial difficulties, legal trouble, disasters
- mental illness & substance use
- LGBTQ+
- family separation
- incarceration
- sexual assault and abuse
- domestic/intimate partner violence (victim, witness, perpetrator)
- bullying (victim and perpetrator)
- chronic health problems
- experience with death or suicide
- personal and cultural characteristics

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Warning Signs

- We're not good at recognizing these!
- Identify circumstances and situations that can increase risk rather than trying to identify individuals at risk
- You don't have to wait for warning signs to ask about suicide

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Warning Signs

Indirect Warning Signs

- Crisis - overwhelming emotional distress
- Feeling empty, hopeless, or worthless
- Feeling trapped or having no solutions to problems
- Withdrawing or from family, friends, or activities
- Changes in eating or sleeping habits
- Engaging in risky and dangerous behaviors
- Overreacting or underreacting
- Guilt or shame
- Anxiety, agitation, or irritability
- Anger or rage
- Extreme mood swings
- Loss of future thought
- Increased alcohol or drug use

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Warning Signs

Verbal

- | | |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| I can't take it anymore. | Nobody cares about me. |
| I'm just done. | No one understands. |
| My life is over. | No one will miss me. |
| I don't want to live like this. | No one needs me. |
| Nothing matters anymore. | They'd be better off without me. |
| What difference does it make? | My family shouldn't have deal with this. |
| I can't do anything right. | I just want to end it all. |
| I'm a failure. | I wish I was never born. |
| I'm just no good. | I want to sleep and not wake up. |

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Warning Signs

Direct Warning Signs

- Talking about having no reason to live
- Talking about being a burden or that others would be better off without them
- Talking about death or wanting to die
- Making jokes about suicide
- Giving away important possessions
- Saying goodbye to family and friends
- Making a will or getting affairs in order, including arranging for care of family members or pets
- Making a plan for suicide or preparing means, such as acquiring a firearm or stockpiling pills

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How To Ask

Create a Safe Space

- Ask in private
- Explain your concerns
- Normalize suicide to reduce shame
- Be direct – use the word suicide
- Don't suggest a "no" answer
- Ask twice before accepting a denial
- Reassure that you are asking because you care

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How To Ask

I understand that things are really hard right now. It seems like you really miss school and being with your friends. I've noticed that you've been crying and seem to be on edge. **Signs & Concerns**

Others have said that sometimes when they get really stressed or upset they think about suicide. Is this something that you have thought about? **Normalize**

Sometimes these thoughts can just pop into your head and go away quickly. Has that ever happened? **Ask Twice**

Say "Suicide"

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What Not To Say

Don't minimize or trivialize problems:

- It's not really that bad.
- It's just a {test, game, fight...}.
- None of this will matter later.
- You're just mad. You'll get over it.

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How To Ask

Sometimes when people feel really hurt and overwhelmed, they may not be able to see ways that things can get better. When you say that you are done with it all, do you mean that you are thinking about suicide? **Signs & Concerns**

It's not unusual for people to wish that they were dead or think others would be better off if they were dead. Have you ever thought that? **Ask Twice**

Say "Suicide"

Normalize

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What Not To Say

Don't give praise or admiration:

- You have so much to live for.
- You're such a great person.
- You have so many people who love you.

Don't leverage relationships:

- How can you do that to your family?
- Think about how your family would feel.
- Your friends would miss you.

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What Not To Say

Don't push positivity:

- Just try to think happy thoughts.
- Stop being so negative.

Don't promise that things will get better:

- You'll feel better tomorrow.
- Everything's going to be ok.

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What To Say

Maintain a safe space:

- I'm glad you feel safe talking to me.
- Thank you for trusting me.

Sympathize:

- I'm sorry you're hurting.
- I'm sorry this is happening to you.

Encourage sharing (but don't ask why):

- Can you tell me about what's making you feel that way?
- Can you tell me more about that?

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What Not To Say

Don't give advice:

- You need to eat better and get more exercise.
- You should see about getting medication.

Don't problem solve until you have validated:

- A tutor would be able to help with your grades.
- Just break up and move on. He's not worth it.

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What To Say

Validate feelings:

- It's ok if you're not ok.
- It's understandable that you feel...
- You have the right to feel...

Assess risk:

- Plan - Have you thought about how you might do it?
- Intent - Do you intend to act on this plan?
- Means - Do you have {a gun, pills, etc.}?

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What To Say

Offer support:

- You are not alone. I'm here for you.
- I care about you and I want to help.

Empower to meet needs:

- What can I do to support you?
- What do you need from me right now?

Encourage healthy coping & remind of strengths:

- When you've felt like this before, what has helped?
- You can get through this.

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Goals for Conversation

- Give space to talk about problems
- Provide emotional support and validation
- Shift their focus to the future and reasons for living
- Plan next steps toward safety

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What To Say

Encourage help-seeking:

- Other people will know more about what to do.
We can find someone who can help.
- You don't have to do this alone. It can help to have others who can support you.

Offer your presence (if you can):

- I'll go with you and we'll do it together.
- I'll sit with you while you call the hotline.

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Hotlines

- Who should contact
- When to contact
- How to contact
- What happens next
- Considerations



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