

## Youth Suicide Prevention

In Nebraska, suicide is the leading cause of death for ages 10-14. Nationally, suicide was the 2<sup>nd</sup> leading cause of death for ages 10-24 in 2017 (10.6 per 100,000), according to a study completed by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention. This is a sharp increase (56%) from the steady suicide rate observed in 2000-2007 (6.8 per 100,000). These numbers are alarming, but there are ways to prevent youth suicide and it all begins with awareness and education.

### Risk Factors

There is not just one specific cause or predictor that would indicate whether or not a person is contemplating suicide. Several factors increase the risk of suicide. Possible risk factors include:

- Recent relationship loss; this may include the death of a loved one or a close friend moving away
- History of trauma or abuse; this may also include bullying or family violence
- Mental health or substance use concerns
- Family history of suicide
- Lack of social support
- Lack of access to health care, including mental health treatment
- Access to lethal means



### Warning Signs

The presence of one or more of the signs listed below may indicate an increased risk of engaging in suicide:

- Talking about wanting to die
- Expressing feelings of hopelessness or feeling trapped
- Appears withdrawn or isolated from friends or activities they once enjoyed
- Extreme mood swings or increased irritability
- Changes in sleep patterns
- Giving away possessions

It is important to note that a person may not directly say that they want to die or they want to attempt suicide. They may say something like “The world would be a better place without me”. These feelings may also be expressed through a note or social media post. These comments need to be taken seriously and should not be kept secret. Encourage youth to talk to a trusted adult if they are concerned about something a peer said or posted online.

When a youth is displaying signs that they are contemplating suicide, calmly ask the person directly if they are thinking about suicide. Listen to the individual, validate their feelings and provide emotional support without judgment. Assure the person that they are not alone and that help is available. Do not leave the person unsupervised. Contact the parents or guardians of the student and get help. The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is available 24/7 (1-800-273-8255). The Lifeline is supported by crisis

workers who help talk through the present situation and can assist in locating resources. If accessible, a suicide risk assessment may also be completed to determine the level of risk.

Connecting the student and their family to supports is crucial. There are multiple options for families to access treatment and support. Families may choose to meet with a therapist at a SCIP agency or find a mental health agency on their own. A physician can offer recommendations and discuss medications available. Depending on the severity of the situation, inpatient therapy may be necessary. Maintaining open lines of communication between the school and parents will help ensure the safety of the student. The schools can provide an extra layer of support by connecting the student to in-school supports, like a mentor or support group. A regular informal meeting with an adult the student has a close relationship with can also be helpful.

Talking to a person that is contemplating suicide can trigger our own fears and emotions. Do not hesitate to reach out for assistance and practice self-care. The same applies to youth that want to help a peer.

To learn more about how you can help prevent youth suicide, view the links below:

<https://www.nami.org/learn-more/mental-health-conditions/related-conditions/suicide>

Contact your area behavioral health region about participating in a free QPR (Question, Persuade, Refer) training. The mission of QPR is to save lives and reduce suicidal behaviors by providing innovative, practical and proven suicide prevention training. QPR training provides an overview of the warning signs of a suicide crisis and how to question, persuade and refer someone to help. Find your regional contact here: <http://youthsuicideprevention.nebraska.edu/training/>

Attend the SCIP Spring Conference, “Help, Hope, Heal: Finding Light Through the Darkness” on March 27, 2020 in Lincoln, NE. [https://scipnebraska.com/trainings\\_and\\_events/conferences-and-workshops.html/event/2020/03/27/scip-spring-conference-/270072](https://scipnebraska.com/trainings_and_events/conferences-and-workshops.html/event/2020/03/27/scip-spring-conference-/270072)

#### References:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/02/well/mind/the-crisis-in-youth-suicide.html>

<https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db352-h.pdf>

<https://save.org/about-suicide/>

<https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/how-we-can-all-prevent-suicide/>