

988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline

According to the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP), Suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death for individuals ages 10-24. Suicide is one of the most preventable causes of death. For every person who dies by suicide, 280 people seriously consider suicide and 90% of those who attempt suicide go on to live out their lives (988 Lifeline). Instilling hope and connecting individuals who may be experiencing thoughts of suicide to help and resources is vital in preventing suicide. 988 is one such resource that can serve as a point of connection for individuals who are in need of support.

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline), provides free and confidential emotional support 24 hours, 7 days a week for individuals who are in suicidal crisis or emotional distress. While the Lifeline is comprised of a national network of crisis centers, all calls are routed to their closest center based on area code with the goal of connecting callers to crisis counselors in their own state. Local crisis counselors are familiar with community mental health resources, and can therefore provide referrals to local services. In Nebraska, calls are routed to Boys Town crisis counselors out of Omaha. In addition to the call line, individuals may text 988 or utilize a chat function via the Lifeline website.

The Lifeline is not just for individuals in crisis, family and friends can also utilize the resource to get guidance on how to best support their loved one. Additionally, people do not need to be experiencing thoughts of suicide to call. Counselors are available to listen and offer emotional support for a variety of reasons, including substance abuse, relationship concerns, loneliness, depression, or other mental health issues. Trained crisis counselors are able to provide phone-based triage, support, and local resources. If needed, the counselor can activate a mobile crisis team to de-escalate; provide brief therapeutic interventions, and refer for services.

The Lifeline national network has been in operation since 2005 and numerous studies have shown that callers feel less suicidal, less depressed, less overwhelmed, and more hopeful after speaking with a Lifeline counselor (988 Lifeline). Since its inception, more than 20.5 million people have been helped.

Individuals who call 988 will first hear a message saying that they have reached the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. The language defaults to English but there is an option to choose Spanish. To learn more about what users experience when calling 988, the below links are available:

988 user experience: https://youtu.be/0VcaemqOAMw?si=IPjBDQR_mnuaFgZi

988 call demonstration: <https://youtu.be/xBLOyki4PPw?si=S5nqL19bRSIcCuTS>

The 988 Lifeline website also offers a variety of helpful resources and information. Individuals in crisis can find information about how to make a safety plan and build a network of support, while individuals who are looking for ways to support a friend or family member can gain access to tips on how to talk with and find help for someone who may be in crisis.

Help Yourself: <https://988lifeline.org/help-yourself/>

Help Someone Else: <https://988lifeline.org/help-someone-else/>

In addition to the 988 Lifeline, Your Life Your Voice from Boys Town offers a variety of helpful information for youth who may be struggling with their mental health, including thoughts of suicide. Visit <https://www.yourlifeyourvoice.org/Pages/suicidal-thoughts.aspx> for additional tools and journal activities to help promote healthy coping skills. The My Life My Voice Mobile App also offers a mood journal, an interactive tool that can be used to track feelings with emojis and get tips on how to identify triggers or deal with stressful situations. The app can be accessed via Google Play or downloaded from the Apple App Store.

References: American Foundation for Suicide Prevention; Boys Town: Your Life Your Voice; 988 Lifeline

Combatting School Avoidance

For many students, it's common to avoid going to school some days. Between class work, social situations, perhaps a disliked class or teacher; many kids may not want to attend on a given day. However, when this feeling begins to carry into a prolonged period, it can be a sign of a larger issue. Namely: school avoidance. According to Yale, school avoidance is categorized as missing ten percent or more of school days in a given year. This definition does not include those that may have family or medical issues that may prevent them from attending. Rather, it refers to those students who have troubles with school due to challenges related to academic, social, or emotional struggles. Per Yale, as many as fifteen percent of students are school avoidant.

School avoidance can appear in a variety of ways. For many students, anxieties for what school holds in store can manifest as aches, fatigue, nausea, or other physical symptoms. These students might ask to stay home due to feeling sick, or head to the nurse during school in hopes of having a pass to leave. While symptoms of illness should be taken seriously, if it becomes a common trend to be "sick" frequently and intermittently, it could be a sign of anxieties manifesting for the school day. In addition, some kids may struggle to arrive on time, may leave school early, or, of course, may fail to attend in general. This is much easier to identify as school avoidance, although it may result in punishment for their behavior from the school, potentially worsening their avoidance. It's also important to acknowledge the strength and duration of the avoidance. Many kids will be passively resistant to attending school, but unless they take action to avoid school, and do so repeatedly, it is not a strong sign of school avoidance.

It's crucial as parents and educators to learn about what is causing any avoidant behaviors. While there are a large variety of possibilities, a few of the most common are:

- **Academic Pressure** – For many, the pressure to succeed in classes can be hard to cope with. Whether it be a class they struggle with, a fear of failure, or just struggling to focus during classes, many kids can experience strong emotional distress when facing their school day.
- **Social Concerns** – For everyone, social struggles can be very hard to get through. Those experiencing bullying, having rumors spread about them, or struggling to engage with their peers and feel accepted may turn to avoiding school.
- **Mental Health Concerns** – While this is not always the case, school avoidance is associated with those who have conditions like separation anxiety, social anxiety, or depression. These conditions can have a profound effect on a person's life already, and in conjunction with other stressors at school, can lead to avoiding attendance altogether.

If a child or student is identified as being school avoidant, there are a few things to keep in mind for helping them through the situation. First and foremost, establishing a connection between the parents and the teachers can be an excellent first step in determining the reason for avoidance. In most

cases, parents and teachers each only see half the picture. A student may not want to feel that they've let their parents down by struggling in school, or they may not have a close enough relationship with any teacher to vocalize what's causing their anxieties at school. In cases like these, beginning dialogue between home and school can be a vital first step in understanding what is happening. Other actions to take while learning the cause include:

- **Listen** – While they may not always say what is bothering or concerning them directly, they may hint at it or imply it. Keep an ear out and relay that information to others keeping an eye on the situation.
- **Be Understanding** – Don't dismiss what they tell you because of their avoidance. While they may be avoiding school, their own anxieties and the symptoms it creates are real to them. It's important to respect where they're coming from. Treat their physical symptoms seriously, to remain on the safe side.
- **Disincentivize Being Home** – For many, a day home from school means unlimited computer, video game, or phone time. If the child has become school avoidant, restricting these incentives can help decrease their resistance. For instance, using parental controls on a video game console or phone to restrict how long they can be on it, turning off the Wi-Fi, or simply keeping them in eyesight while they're home can all decrease the perceived upside of being home. Additionally, requesting to have homework sent home to them can assist in making them more comfortable with school and avoid staying home being a reward.
- **Act Swiftly** – Don't delay if a child begins showing signs of school avoidance. The longer they're out of school, the harder it will be for them to return. Both due to falling behind in classes, as well as unwanted attention from others because of their absences.

Often, school avoidance can be remedied by implementing strategies on a case-by-case basis for each student. Individual academic and social supports, especially those that can be done discreetly to prevent embarrassment, can help students greatly. However, for some, in-school supports are not enough. For those individuals, an appointment with a mental health care provider can help to understand where their difficulties rise from. Be it a mental health disorder, an attention deficit disorder, or simply benefiting from regular therapy, a mental health provider can be a valuable asset in helping your student feel more capable to return to school.

For more information on school avoidance, please check out the resources below:

<https://childmind.org/article/when-kids-refuse-to-go-to-school/>

<https://www.yalemedicine.org/conditions/school-related-problems>

<https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/school-refusal-when-a-child-wont-go-to-school-2018091814756>

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9686247/>

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/emotional-problems/Pages/School-Avoidance.aspx>

https://www.newportacademy.com/resources/restoring-families/school-refusal/#block_4ee957bcb4d54efda7f24cf9542c0caa-2

December...National Impaired Driving Prevention Month

During the holiday season in December, most of us look forward to celebrating with our family and friends over multiple gatherings. However, December has proven year after year to be a very deadly month due/related to impaired driving.

How National Impaired Driving Prevention Month Got Started:

In 1980, a thirteen-year-old girl was hit and killed in a drunk driving accident. During that time, driving while intoxicated was a misdemeanor that was rarely prosecuted. That fact was very unsettling to the girl's mother, Candy Lightner, and she took action that ultimately resulted in the founding of the non-profit organization known as MADD, Mothers Against Drunk Driving.

The following year, in 1981, December would become known as the National Impaired Driving Prevention Month.

Candy Lightner is currently the president of "We Save Lives" where she continues to sponsor and support anti-drunk, drugged and distracted driving legislation. For more information on "We Save Lives", click on <https://wesavelives.org/>.

Some "Sobering" Data on Drunk and Drugged Driving:

A recent study in 2020, led by the National Highway Safety Traffic Administration (NHTSA), showed that 56 percent of seriously or fatally injured drivers tested positive for some type of drug known to have potentially impairing effects. Marijuana and alcohol were the leading impaired substances drivers tested positive for at time of accident where a serious injury and/or death occurred. Below is the specific percent breakdown for impaired drugs found in drivers involved in serious and/or fatal vehicle accidents.

- Marijuana was present in 25% of drivers.
- Alcohol was present in 23% of drivers.
- Stimulants were present in 11% of drivers.
- Opioids were present in 9% of drivers.

Furthermore, the presence of two or more of these drugs were reported in 18% of drivers where serious injuries occurred and 32% where death occurred.

What About Teen and Young Drivers who Drink and/or use Other Drugs While Driving?

The fact is motor vehicle crashes remains the leading cause of death for teens in the United States. Teens are already 4 times more likely to be involved in a crash than adults even when alcohol or other drugs are not part of the equation. When alcohol and/or other drugs are added, the risk increases exponentially.

According to Children's Hospital Research Institute, in 2021, 27% of teen/young drivers between the ages of 15 to 20 involved in fatal crashes had blood alcohol concentrations (BACs) of .01 g/dL or higher and 22% of those teen/young drivers were above the legal limit as they had BACs of .08 g/dL or higher.

In addition to driving, the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) survey, conducted in 2019, showed that 17% of high school students reported they had been a passenger in a vehicle with a driver who had been drinking/drugging at the time. The study further reports teens who knowingly ride in vehicles with drivers who have been drinking/drugging are also more likely to drive after drinking/drugging themselves.

However, it is not all bad news. While teens who drink and drive are more likely to be involved in a serious motor vehicle accident than adults who also drink and drive, the fact is teens are much less likely to drive after drinking compared to adults in the first place. This reason alone demonstrates the power of prevention.

Prevention Matters:

Talking openly and honestly with your family, especially kids/teens, is one of the best prevention tools we have at our disposal. You can start by discussing the dangers of teens drinking alcohol and using other drugs and how the dangers related to use are compounded when driving or riding in a vehicle is added into the equation. You can go to SAMHSA's ["Talk. They Hear You."](#) campaign for help on how you and caregivers can start these kinds of conversations with kids.

And while open conversations are one of the best prevention strategies, leading by example matters even more. "Do as I say, not as I do" has never been a very successful strategy. As adults, we need to make sure we are leading by example. We need to model responsible drinking which includes not drinking excessively and not driving after having drinks.

After all, this holiday season, we all have the potential and power to prevent a celebration from becoming a tragedy. When we practice prevention, we are actively helping to keep ourselves, kids and communities safe so that we can truly enjoy the holiday season.

<https://www.nsc.org/road/safety-topics/impaired-driving>

<https://www.samhsa.gov/blog/national-impaired-driving-prevention-month>

<https://wesavelives.org/>

https://www.cdc.gov/transportationsafety/teen_drivers/teendriv_ers_factsheet.html