

# Suicide Prevention & Awareness Guide

Suicide is a major health concern in the United States that impacts thousands of young people, their families and communities each year. In this guide you will find resources, tips and important information to help support youth at your Club.

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If you or someone you know is in need of support, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255 to speak with a counselor at any time.

## Definitions

- **Suicide** is defined as a death caused by self-directed, potentially injurious behavior with intent to die as a result of the behavior.
- A **suicide attempt** is a non-fatal, self-directed, potentially injurious behavior with intent to die as a result of the behavior. A suicide attempt might not result in injury.
- **Suicidal ideation** refers to thinking about, considering or planning suicide.
- **Suicidal behavior** includes suicidal ideation, suicide attempts and completed suicide.

## The Facts

Suicide is the second leading cause of death for young people between the ages of 10 and 24 in the United States, claiming the lives of over 6,100 young people annually.<sup>1</sup> In the past 10 years, rates of death due to suicide among young people have more than doubled.<sup>2</sup>

Deaths from youth suicide is only part of the issue – suicide attempts and ideation are also major concerns. A nationwide survey of high school students found that, in the past 12 months, 17.2 percent of students reported seriously considering suicide, 13.6 percent reported creating a plan, and 7.4 percent reported trying to take their own life.<sup>3</sup> Every year, approximately 157,000 youth between the ages of 10 and 24 are treated for self-inflicted injuries and attempted suicide.<sup>4</sup>

Suicide does not discriminate. People of all genders, ages and ethnicities can be at risk. Of reported suicides in young people, 81 percent of those who died were male, and 19 percent were female. However, female youth are nearly twice as likely to report attempting suicide as their male counterparts. Native American youth have the highest rates of suicide-related fatalities; Hispanic youth are more likely to report attempting suicide than their black and white, non-Hispanic peers.<sup>4</sup>

## Learn the Warning Signs

Childhood, especially the teen years, are a stressful time. They are filled with many changes including body changes, changes in thoughts, and changes in feelings. Strong feelings of stress, confusion, fear, doubt and pressure to succeed may influence youths' problem-solving and decision-making abilities.<sup>5</sup>

For some youth, these changes can be very unsettling when combined with other events such as changes in their family, changes in friendships, or difficulties in school. These problems may seem too hard or embarrassing to overcome and, for some, suicide may seem like a solution.

Suicidal behavior is complex because there is no single cause. More than half of the youth who died by suicide in the past year did not have a known mental health condition.<sup>4</sup>

Approximately 70 percent of people tell someone or display warning signs before taking their own lives.<sup>6</sup> **It is important to remember that suicidal thoughts or actions are a sign of extreme distress and should not be ignored.** Club staff and peers may be in the best position to recognize when a young person might need help. You may see the following warning signs firsthand, hear about them secondhand, or see them online in social media.

- Previous suicide attempts
- Suicide notes or threats
- Making final arrangements, such as saying goodbye to friends, giving away prized possessions, or deleting online profiles
- Isolation, loneliness, withdrawing from friends
- Talking about feeling hopeless, trapped, in pain, being a burden to others, or having no reason to live
- Obsession with death or dying
- Self-injury (e.g., cutting)
- Mental illness (e.g., depression)
- Increasing use of alcohol or drugs
- Family stress or dysfunction (e.g., divorce)
- Family history of suicide
- Environmental risks, such as presence of a firearm in the home
- Acting up in class or at the Club and behaving recklessly
- Sleeping too little or too much
- Displaying extreme mood swings and acting anxious
- Situational crises, such as bullying, failing in school, breakup of a relationship/friendship, death of a loved one, physical or sexual abuse, family violence, suicide of a peer or celebrity, etc.

If you or someone you know exhibits any of these warning signs, **seek help immediately.**

## Preventing Youth Suicide

Suicide is preventable. By recognizing the warning signs, listening, talking and taking action, you could save a life. The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline has five evidence-informed action steps for communicating with someone who may be suicidal:<sup>7</sup>

### 1. ASK

Asking the question “Are you thinking about suicide?” communicates that you are open to speaking about suicide in a non-judgmental, supportive way. Asking in this direct manner can open the door for effective dialogue and allow everyone to see what steps need to be taken.

Another piece of the “Ask” step is to listen. Listening to a person’s reasons for being in pain, as well as reasons they want to stay alive, are both incredibly important. Help them focus on *their* reasons for living and avoid trying to impose *your* reasons for them to stay alive.

### 2. KEEP THEM SAFE

It is important to find out a few things to establish immediate safety. Have they already done anything to try to kill themselves before talking to you? Do they have a detailed plan for how they would kill themselves? What sort of access do they have to their planned method? Knowing the answers to these questions can tell you a lot about the severity of danger this person is in. For example, if they have immediate access to a firearm or medications, they may be at higher risk for enacting their plan, and emergency steps might be necessary (calling 911 or taking them to an emergency room).

### 3. BE THERE

Being there for someone with thoughts of suicide is lifesaving. Increasing someone’s connectedness to others and limiting their isolation is shown to be a protective factor against suicide. This could mean being physically present for someone, speaking with them on the phone, finding others who can help, or any other way that shows support.

### 4. HELP THEM CONNECT

Helping someone with suicidal thoughts connect with ongoing treatment, supports and resources can help them establish a safety net for those moments when they are in a crisis. One way to help them connect is to develop a [safety plan](#). This can include ways for them to identify when or if they start to experience thoughts of suicide, and what to do in those crisis moments. This plan can also include a list of individuals to contact when a crisis occurs, contact for a mental health professional, and resources in the community.

### 5. FOLLOW UP

After you have connected them with the immediate support systems they need, make sure to follow up with them to see how they are doing. Leave a message, send a text, or give them a call to check in. This type of contact and support can increase their feelings of connectedness and reduce their risk for suicide.

There are also protective factors that can decrease the risk of suicide in youth. Clubs, schools, communities, families and friends can all work together to build these factors in and around youth. These factors include:<sup>8</sup>

- **Family and peer support**

This includes the establishment of caring, supportive adult-youth and youth-youth relationships, and emphasizing family involvement at the Club.

- **Club and community connectedness**

It may be helpful for Clubs to consult trained experts, or to have trained professionals at the Club who can conduct [risk assessments](#), warn or inform families, provide recommendations and referrals to community services, provide follow-up counseling and support, and establish effective partnerships with mental health agencies.

- **Protective environments**

Establishing a protective environment can take many forms, from working with families to reduce access to firearms and medications in the home, to establishing a positive, inclusive climate within the Club. For more information on creating a positive Club environment, visit [BGCA.net/ClubClimate](http://BGCA.net/ClubClimate), [BGCA.net/LGBTQ](http://BGCA.net/LGBTQ) and [BGCA.net/Inclusion](http://BGCA.net/Inclusion).

- **Adaptive coping and problem-solving skills**

It is important to help youth learn positive coping methods such as self-care and finding support groups rather than turning to substance use or other negative coping behaviors. The development of resilience factors such as conflict resolution and effective problem-solving skills are also essential. Staff can model these positive behaviors for youth.

- **General life satisfaction, good self-esteem and sense of purpose**

Staff can help youth follow their passions and increase overall happiness by encouraging youth to join groups focused on a favorite hobby, take a class to learn something new, volunteer for things they care about, and meet new people. Staff can also model healthy behaviors, share good habits, and promote mindfulness and stress reduction techniques.

- **Easy access to effective medical and mental health resources**

Clubs can establish partnerships with local mental health agencies, and work with schools and community partners to provide youth and families with referrals to counselors and mental health providers.

## Helpful Resources

- **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline**

The Lifeline provides 24/7, free and confidential support for people in distress, prevention and crisis resources for you or your loved ones, and best practices for professionals. 1-800-273-TALK (8255) <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>

- **BGCA's Club Safety Hotline**

Ensuring the safety of children is the No. 1 priority of Boys & Girls Clubs. BGCA provides a confidential, 24-hour toll-free Child Safety Hotline: 1-866-607-SAFE (7233).

- **Find Your Local Crisis or Support Center**

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline has a network of over 150 local crisis centers. Find your nearest crisis center here: <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/our-network/>

SAMHSA also has a network of behavioral health treatment service providers. Find your local facility here: <https://findtreatment.samhsa.gov/>

- **BeThe1To Resources**

BeThe1To is the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline's message for spreading the work about steps we can all take to prevent suicide. Visit <http://www.bethe1to.com/> to find events related to suicide prevention, learn the action steps, and find helpful resources.

- **Be There**

*Be There* is BGCA's comprehensive approach to increasing the capacity of Clubs to help youth build supportive relationships and support youth, staff, and families who are grieving. The full *Be There* toolkit, including suicide-specific resources, can be found at [BGCA.net/BeThere](http://BGCA.net/BeThere).

- **Mental Health First Aid**

BGCA's partnership with Mental Health First Aid provides Club staff with training at select regional conferences on how to identify, understand, and respond to signs of mental illness and substance use disorders. <https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/>

- **Stop a Suicide Today**

A program of Screening for Mental Health, Inc., Stop a Suicide Today is a campaign to empower individuals to help others who feel suicidal. <http://stopasuicide.org/>

- **American Association of Suicidology**

The AAS has resources, trainings, fact sheets, and programs to help prevent youth suicide. <https://www.suicidology.org/ncpys/resources>

## Resources for LGBTQ Youth

Because of stigma and discrimination, LGBTQ youth are more likely than non-LGBTQ youth to struggle with their mental health.<sup>9</sup> Approximately 28 percent of LGBTQ youth – including 40 percent of transgender youth – said they felt depressed most or all of the time.<sup>10</sup> LGBTQ youth are more than twice as likely to feel suicidal, and more than 4 times as likely to attempt suicide compared to heterosexual youth.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, a third of transgender youth have seriously considered suicide, and 1 in 5 has made a suicide attempt.<sup>12</sup>

Supportive environments at home, school and the Club can help LGBTQ youth thrive and promote positive mental health. Strong family bonds, safe environments, and support from caring adults and peers can all protect LGBTQ youth from depression and suicidal behavior.

Below are several resources developed specifically for supporting LGBTQ youth:

- **The Trevor Project**

A leading national organization providing crisis intervention and suicide prevention services to LGBTQ youth. <https://www.thetrevorproject.org>

The Trevor Lifeline has trained counselors available 24/7 for young people looking for a safe, judgment-free place to talk: 1-866-488-7386

- **It Gets Better**

An organization working to uplift, empower, and connect LGBTQ youth around the world. <https://itgetsbetter.org/>

- **Trans Lifeline**

An organization dedicated to fighting the epidemic of trans suicide by connecting the community to direct service, resources, and education. <http://www.translifeline.org/>

The hotline: 877-565-8860

- **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline**

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline has a page dedicated to LGBTQ people and allies. Resources include self-care strategies, tips for allies and stories. 1-800-273-TALK (8255) <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/help-yourself/lgbtq/>

- **BGCA LGBTQ Toolkit**

BGCA's LGBTQ Toolkit is filled with resources, best practices, and tools to create a safe, positive environment for LGBTQ youth and can be found at [BGCA.net/LGBTQ](http://BGCA.net/LGBTQ).



## Resources for Native Youth

Suicide in native communities is a private, sensitive topic. If a suicide happens, it is not usually talked about. Suicide also looks different in native communities than it does in the general population. Nationally, suicide tends to skew middle-aged (and white), but among Native Americans, 40 percent who die by suicide are between the ages of 15 and 24. Native teens experience the highest rate of suicide of any population group in the United States, and are subject to suicide rates more than 3 times the national average.<sup>4</sup>

Native LGBTQ and Two Spirit individuals who experience family rejection also have increased risk of suicide. LGBTQ and Two Spirit natives who reported high levels of family rejection were 8 times more likely to have attempted suicide compared to peers with no or low levels of family rejection.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, 56 percent of Native transgender individuals reported attempting suicide compared to 41 percent of all other transgender groups.<sup>14</sup>

- **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline**

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline has a page dedicated to Native Americans. Resources include self-care strategies, tips, and stories. 1-800-273-TALK (8255) <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/help-yourself/native-americans/>

- **StrongHearts Native Helpline**

The StrongHearts Native Helpline is a safe, confidential service for Native Americans affected by domestic violence. Advocates are available at no cost Monday-Friday from 9am-5:30pm: 1-844-7NATIVE (1-844-762-8483). <http://www.strongheartshelpline.org/>

- **Be There**

Be There is BGCA's comprehensive approach to increasing the capacity of Clubs to help native youth build supportive relationships and support youth, staff and families who are grieving. The full native adaptation of the Be There toolkit, including suicide-specific resources, can be found at <http://naclubs.org/be-there/>.

- **Suicide Prevention Resource Center**

The Suicide Prevention Resource Center has resources, videos, guides, and other information for native communities. <https://www.sprc.org/settings/aian>

- **Indian Health Services**

Indian Health Services has numerous resources to support suicide prevention efforts for communities and individuals. <https://www.ihs.gov/suicideprevention/>

- **Mental Health First Aid**

BGCA Native Services is providing trainings on Mental Health First Aid to give Club staff the skills to help and support individuals experiencing mental health problems or crises. <http://naclubs.org/mental-health-first-aid-training/>

## Resources for Military Youth

Every day, 20 veterans die by suicide. This puts veterans' risk for suicide 22 percent higher than non-veterans.<sup>15</sup> BGCA serves thousands of military families, and this increasing rate of suicide among veterans is also leading to increased mental health issues and rising suicide rates among military-related youth. Below are resources designed specifically for military families:

- **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline**

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline has a page dedicated to veterans. Resources include self-care strategies, tips, and stories. <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/help-yourself/veterans/>

- **Veterans Crisis Line**

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline also has a dedicated crisis line for veterans and family members of veterans that provides free, confidential, 24/7 support. Call 1-800-273-8255 and Press 1 to talk to a trained counselor. You can also chat online at <https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/get-help/chat> or send a text message to 838255.

- **Find a Facility Near You**

If you or a veteran you know are in crisis, go to <https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/get-help/local-resources> to find a facility near you.

- **Veterans Self-Check Quiz**

This is a safe, easy way to learn whether stress or depression might be affecting you or someone you know: <https://www.vetselfcheck.org/welcome.cfm>

- **Suicide Prevention Resources**

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs has a comprehensive list of suicide warning signs and resources for veterans and their families. [https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide\\_prevention/](https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention/)

## Spanish-language Resources (Ayuda en Español)

- **La Red Nacional de Prevención del Suicidio**

La Red ofrece 24/7, servicios gratuitos en español – no es necesario hablar inglés si usted necesita ayuda. Llame a 1-888-628-9454 para hablar con una persona capacitada. Viste a <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/help-yourself/en-espanol/> para más información.

- **Suicidio Juvenil**

[Consejos y datos breves](#) sobre el suicidio juvenil de la Asociación Nacional de Psicólogos Escolares.

## Resources for Youth of Color

- **Suicide Prevention Resource Center**

The Suicide Prevention Resource Center has resources, videos, guides and other information for youth of color.

African Americans: <https://www.sprc.org/populations/blacks-african-americans>

Hispanics and Latinos: <https://www.sprc.org/populations/hispanics-latinos>

Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders: <https://www.sprc.org/populations/asian-pacific-islanders>

- **The Steve Fund**

The Steve Fund supports equity and mental health for young people of color. The organization provides programs and strategies for building understanding of mental health and providing assistance for those in need. <https://www.stevfund.org/>

Young people of color can text STEVE to 741741 to connect with a trained crisis counselor.

- **The JED Foundation**

The JED Foundation works to equip teens and young adults with the skills and support they need to grow into healthy, thriving adults by protecting emotional health and preventing suicide. <https://www.jedfoundation.org/>

The JED Foundation also has a [useful resource](#) on helping a friend in need via social media.

## Resources for Youth With Disabilities

Youth with developmental disabilities are more likely to engage in self-injury, including suicide, than youth without these disabilities. It is important to understand the reasons for self-injury among youth with disabilities in order to find the best treatment.

- **Autistic Self Advocacy Network**

The Autistic Self Advocacy Network provides several resources on suicide, including this [toolkit](#) for self-advocates (pg. 15-17) and this [toolkit](#) for family members (pg. 21-22).

- **Suicide Prevention Resource Center**

The Suicide Prevention Resource Center has resources, videos, guides, and other information for youth with disabilities. <https://www.sprc.org/populations/people-physical-health-problems-or-disabilities>

- **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline**

If you are deaf or hard of hearing, you can chat with a Lifeline counselor 24/7 by clicking the Chat button or you can contact the Lifeline via TTY by dialing 800-799-4889.

<https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/help-yourself/for-deaf-hard-of-hearing/>

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