

## **Bridge to Safety: The School Nurse's Role in Suicide Prevention**

### **Requirements for Successful Completion:**

The registered nurse in the school setting will verbalize increased knowledge of the scope, warning signs and risk factors for teen suicide, and verbalize understanding of mental causes and treatments. They will verbalize understanding of factors to keep a teen from seeking help and specific actions families, communities, and schools can do to help with teen suicide prevention.

To receive contact hours for this continuing education activity, the participant must attend the entire activity and complete and submit the evaluation form.

Once successful completion has been verified, a "Certificate of Successful Completion" will be awarded for .75 contact hours.

### **Conflicts of Interest:**

The activity's Nurse Planner has determined that no one who has the ability to control the content of this CNE activity – planning committee members and presenters/authors/content reviewers – has a conflict of interest.

### **Approval Statement:**

**The University of Texas at Austin School of Nursing is an approved provider of continuing nursing education by the Texas Nurses Association - Approver, an accredited approver with distinction by the American Nurses Credentialing Center's Commission on Accreditation.**

# Bridge to Safety

The School Nurse's Role  
In Suicide Prevention  
(From AFSP's More Than Sad)

# Goals for Participants

- Understand the scope of youth suicide
- Identify the warning signs and risk factors for suicide in teens
- Know how to refer at-risk students
- Get an overview of mental health treatments

# A Few Key Terms

- **Suicidal ideation:** Thoughts of engaging in suicide-related behavior
- **Suicidal behaviors:** Behaviors related to suicide, including preparatory acts, as well as suicide attempts and death
- **Nonsuicidal self-injury:** Self-injury with no intent to die
- **Suicide attempt:** A nonfatal self-directed potentially injurious behavior with any intent to die as a result of the behavior (a suicide attempt may or may not result in injury)
- **Suicide:** Death caused by self-directed injurious behavior with any intent to die as a result of the behavior

# Scope of the Problem (2017\*)

## U.S. Population Overall

- 47,173 *reported* suicide deaths
- 14.0 suicides per 100,000 population (age-adjusted)

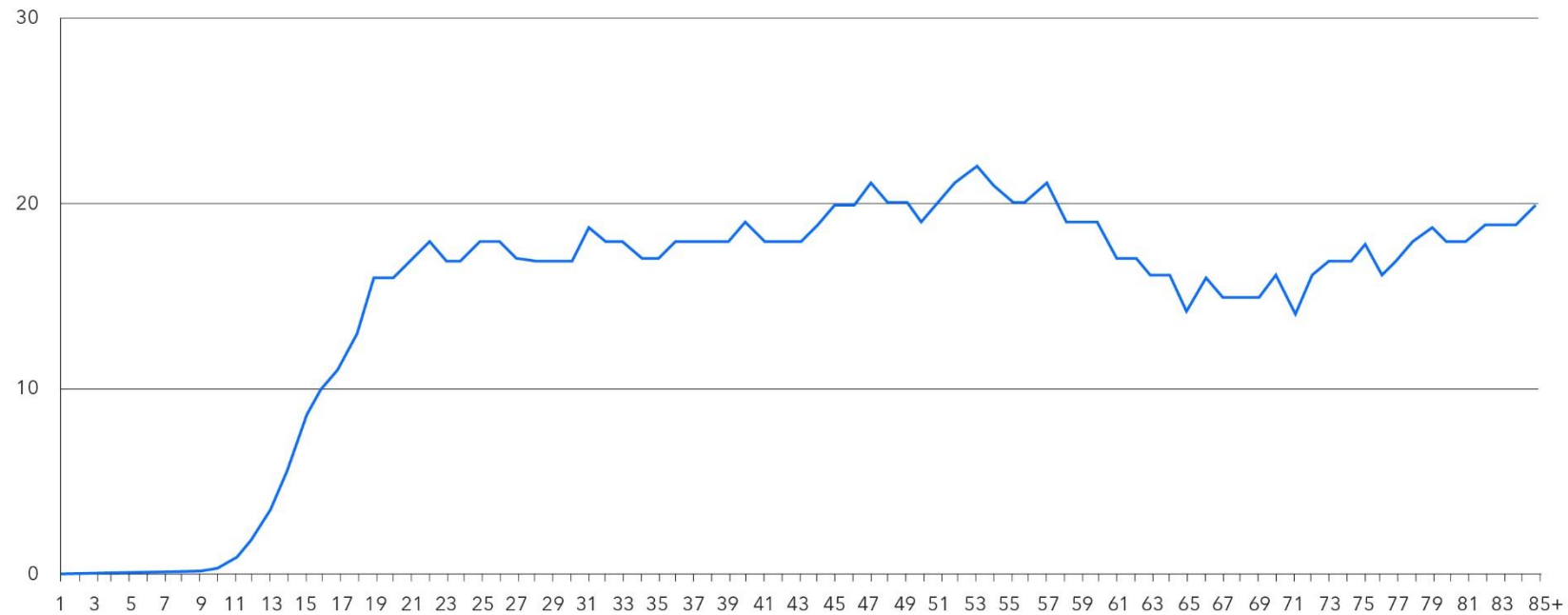
## Youth Ages 10-24

- 6,769 *reported* suicides
- 14.4% of total suicides in the U.S.
- 10.6 suicides per 100,000 youth
- Suicide is the second leading cause of death for youth ages 10-24

\*latest year for which suicide statistics are currently available

# U.S. Suicide Rates

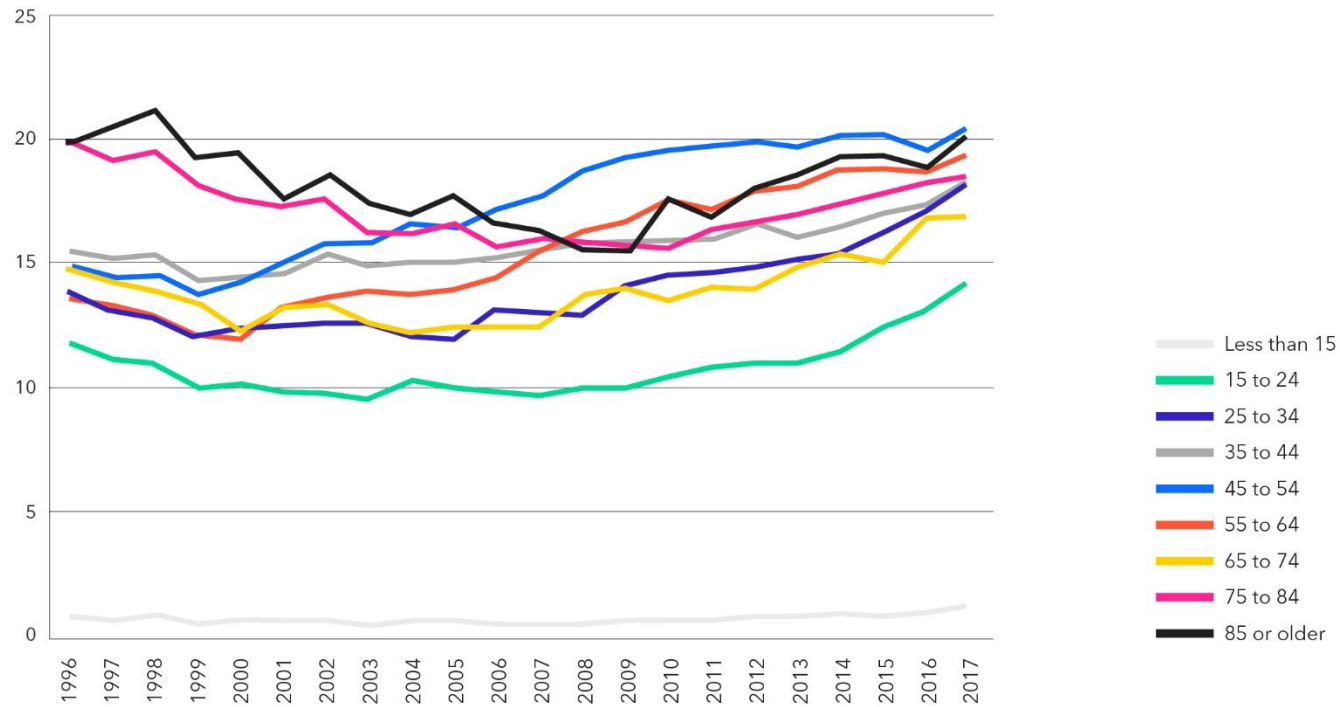
## Across the Lifespan (per 100,000)



Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2017

# U.S. Suicide Rates

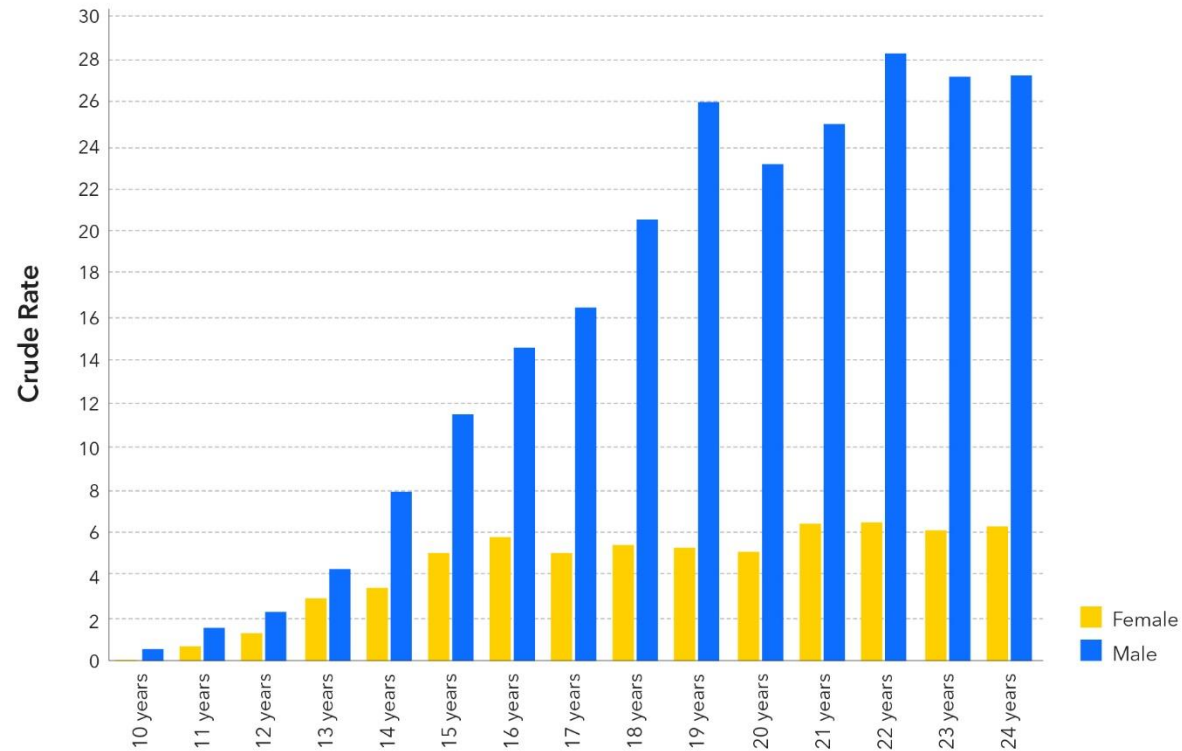
## Age Ranges (per 100,000)



Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2017

# U.S. Youth Suicide Rates

## By Sex (Ages 10-24)



Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2017



# U.S. Youth Suicide Rates

## By Race (Ages 10-24)

Racial Group	Suicide Rate per 100,000
American Indian/Alaskan Native	16.24
White	11.26
Asian/Pacific Islander	8.42
Black	7.66

## By Ethnicity (Ages 10-24)

Ethnic Group	Suicide Rate per 100,000
Hispanic	7.18

Source: CDC, 2017

# Youth Suicide Attempts



- For every suicide, it is estimated that there are 100-200 attempts
- In 2017, approximately 2.4 percent of youth in grades 9-12 reported making a suicide attempt that required treatment by a doctor or nurse.

# National Youth Risk Behavior Survey



- **17.2%** of high school students who completed the Youth Risk Behavior Survey in 2017 reported having seriously considered attempting suicide in the previous year



- **13.6%** reported having made a plan for a suicide attempt in the previous year



- **7.4%** reported having attempted suicide one or more times in the last year

# At-Risk Populations

- Boys complete suicide 3-4 more times the rate of girls
- Female students attempt suicide twice as often as male students
- Attempts are 2-6x more frequent among youth who identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual, than among heterosexual youth
- Each year, there are some new potential trends for various demographic groups

Suicide **ideation** is life-threatening.

It must be taken **seriously** each time.

# Suicide Ideation

- Suicidal ideation is often communicated before an attempt
- Outside of that communication, ideation (and the youth's actual level of distress) is often well hidden

# Risk Factors for Suicide



A key risk factor for suicide in youth is a mental health condition, especially when undetected.

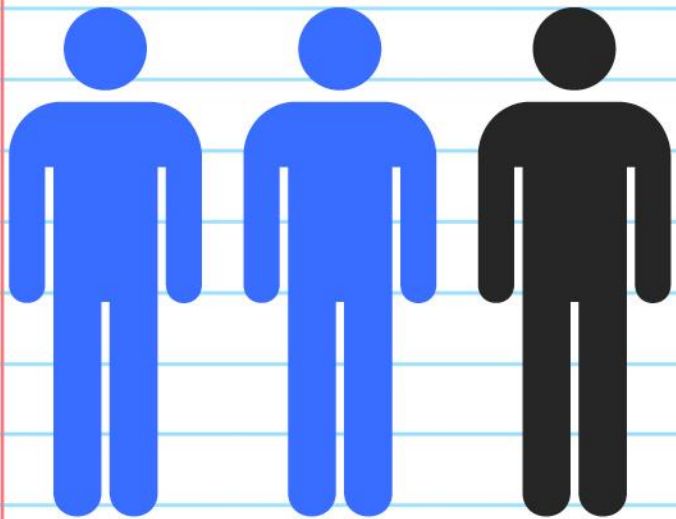
# Common Mental Health Conditions



**Suicide risk in teens is most clearly linked to mental health conditions, which can co-occur together, increasing risk further:**

- Major Depressive Disorder
- Conduct Disorder
- Substance Use Disorders
- Eating Disorders
- Generalized Anxiety Disorder
- Schizophrenia
- Bipolar Disorder



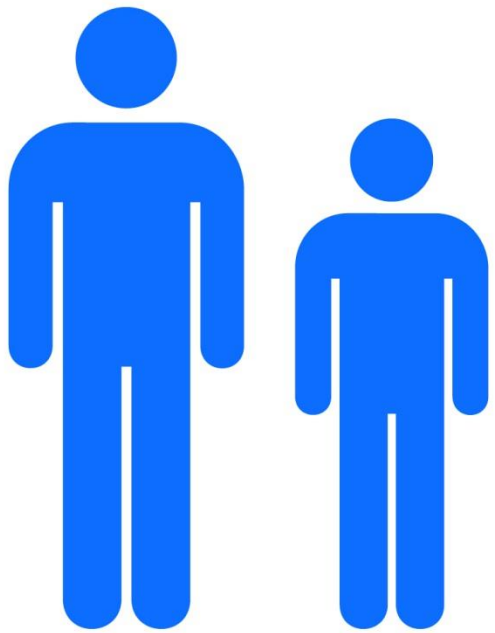


**2** out of **3** teens  
with depression  
don't get treatment.

# Mental Health Treatment

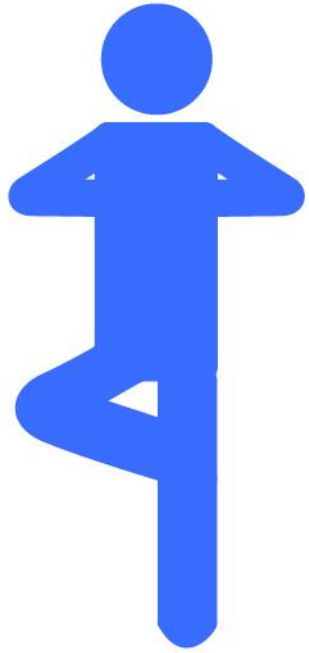
- Depressed teens can show improvement in 4-6 weeks with psychotherapy alone
- Many teens experience significant reduction of symptoms with antidepressant medication
- Medication is usually essential in treating severe depression and other serious mental health conditions like bipolar disorder and schizophrenia

# Mental Health Treatment



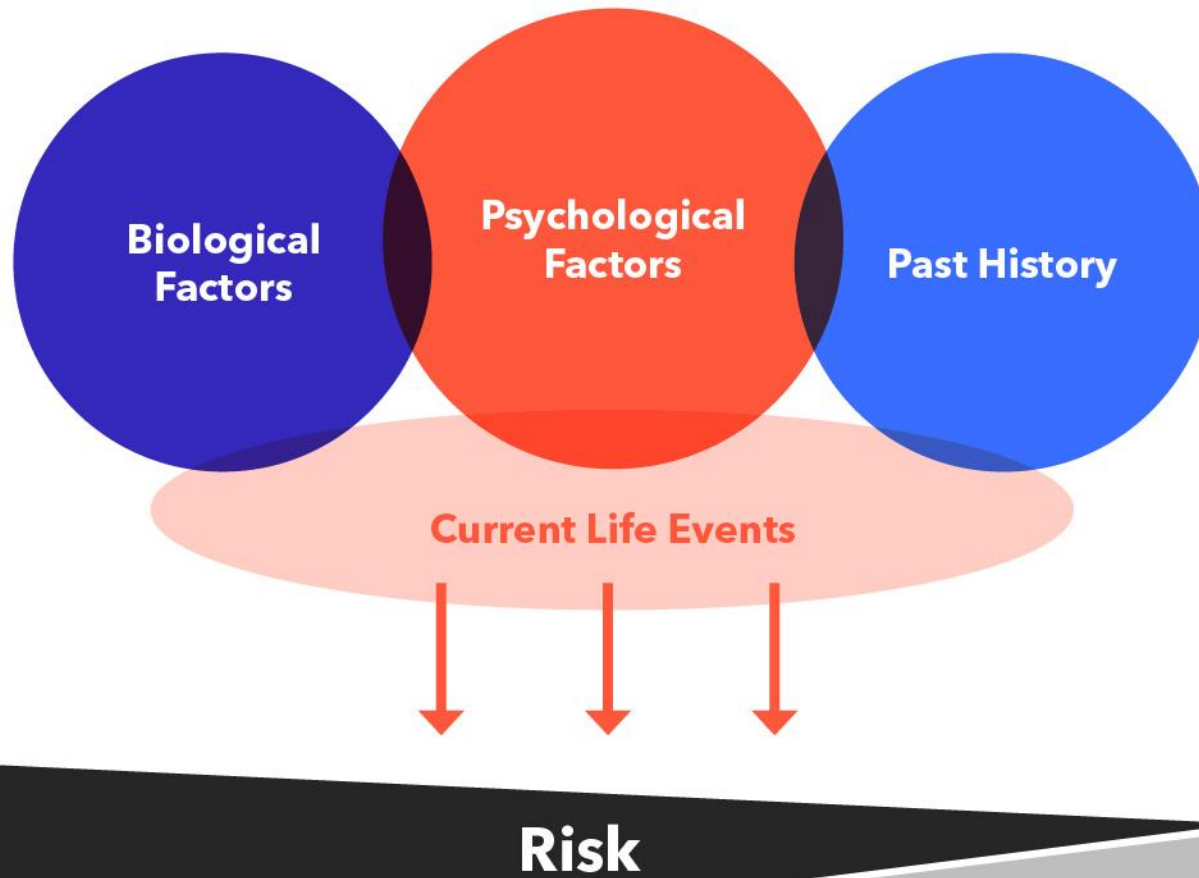
- Treatment is effective for 8 out of 10 people with depression
- No single approach works for everyone; sometimes the person will need to try different treatments
- Mental health conditions can recur, even if effectively treated at one point in time

# Living a Healthy Lifestyle

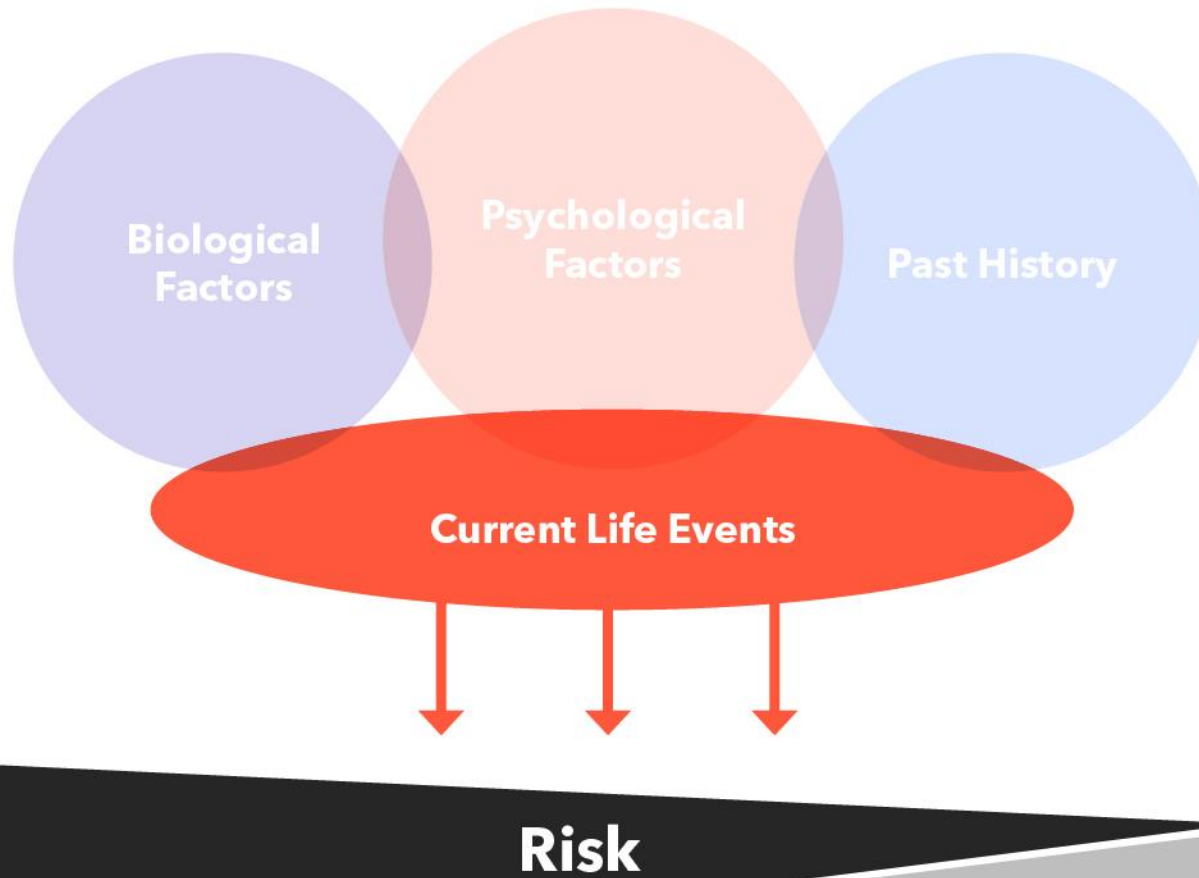


Exercise, yoga, breathing exercises, and changes in diet can improve mood and relieve anxiety and stress.

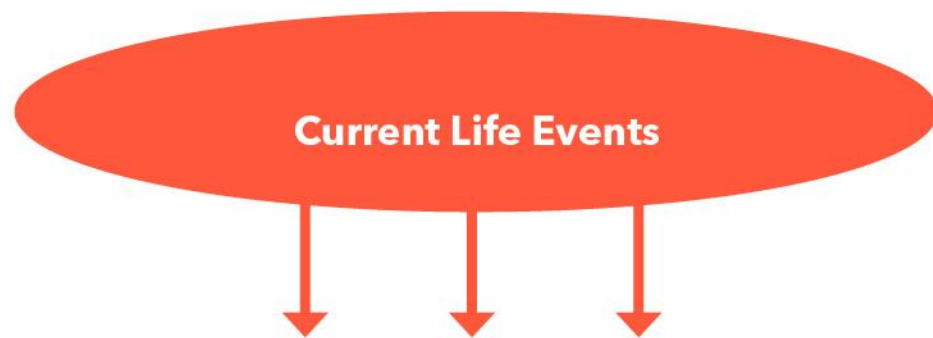
# Interacting Variables → Risk



# Interacting Variables → Risk



**Interacting Variables** → **Risk**



**Risk**

# An Environmental Factor: Bullying



The relationship between bullying and suicide is complex.



# Social Media



Social media is evolving and related research is emerging.

# Identifying At-Risk Students

**Mental health symptoms are often misinterpreted as:**

- Normal adolescent mood swings
- Laziness
- Poor attitude
- Immaturity

# Suicide Risk Factors vs. Warning Signs



Suicide **risk factors** endure over some period of time, while **warning signs** signal **imminent suicide risk**.

# Warning Signs: Talk



## **If a person talks about:**

- Killing themselves
- Having no reason to live
- Being a burden to others
- Feeling trapped
- Unbearable pain

# Warning Signs: Behavior

**Behaviors that may signal risk, especially if related to a painful event, loss, or change:**

- Increasing use of alcohol or drugs
- Looking for a way to end their life, such as searching online for materials or means
- Acting recklessly
- Withdrawing from activities
- Isolating from family and friends
- Sleeping too little or too much
- Visiting or calling people to say goodbye
- Giving away prized possessions
- Increasing aggressive behavior



# Warning Signs: Mood



**People who are considering suicide often display one or more of the following moods:**

- Depression
- Loss of interest
- Rage
- Irritability
- Humiliation
- Anxiety
- Sudden unexplained happiness

# Key Points – *More Than Sad*

- Depression is a common problem that causes significant distress and disruption in teens' lives
- Depression is an **illness** – not a character weakness and not something people can change at will
- Depression may develop after stressful life experiences, but can occur in any teen
- Depression doesn't go away on its own; if left untreated, depression may lead to serious consequences, including suicide
- Treatment for depression is available and treatment works

# Barriers to Treatment for Teens

- Neither teens nor the adults who are close to them recognize the symptoms of their treatable illness
- Fear of what treatment might involve
- Belief that nothing can help
- They don't see help-seeking as a sign of strength
- They are embarrassed
- Believe that adults won't understand
- Limited access to resources (money, insurance, transportation, etc.)



# What Can Help Students Stay Safe

- Receiving effective mental health care when needed
- Fostering positive connections to family, peers, community, and social institutions that foster resilience
- Creating safe and supportive school and community environments
- Helping teens to cultivate problem-solving skills
- Keeping open communication re: mental health concerns

# How Schools Can Prevent Suicide



## **Educate Students about Mental Health Conditions**

Present *More Than Sad: Teen Depression* in the classroom with students grades 9-12



## **Educate Parents about Mental Health Conditions and Suicide Risk**

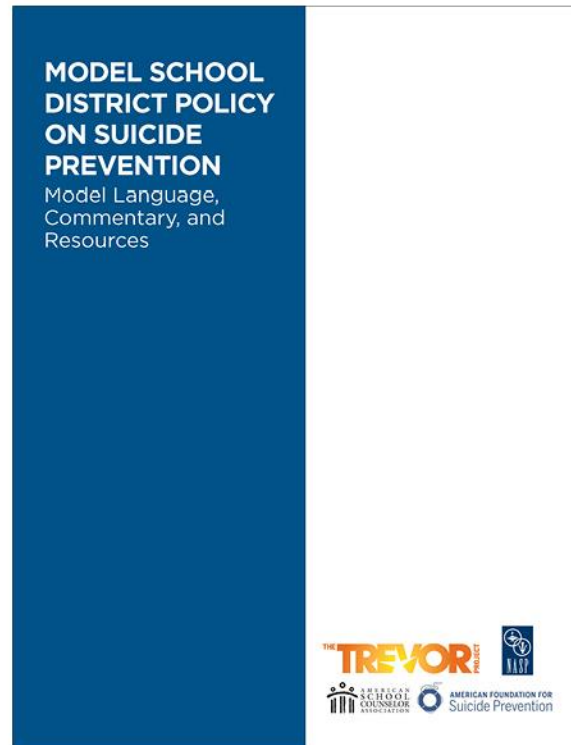
Present *More Than Sad: Parent Education* at a parent meeting



## **Create a Safe Place for Youth Seeking Help for Themselves or Their Friends**

# Model School District Policy on Suicide Prevention

Recommended language for school district policies that address suicide prevention, risk assessment, and how to respond to suicidal behavior in youth.



# A Toolkit for Schools

A guide that shows what a school should do in the aftermath of a suicide to help students, faculty, and staff heal and to decrease the risk of contagion.



# Signs Matter: Early Detection

- An online school-based training program (similar to a webinar)
- Suitable for K-12 educators
- Meets the two-hour requirement for teacher training that is mandated in many states
- Contains student-acted vignettes, expert analysis and commentary
- Requires successful completion of a post-test to measure knowledge
- For more information about how to purchase this program, visit [afsp.org/SignsMatter](https://afsp.org/SignsMatter)



**SIGNS MATTER: EARLY DETECTION**  
Online Suicide Prevention Training for K-12 Educators

Educators play a critical role in the fight against suicide because they are in a unique position to notice changes in the mental health of their students and identify signs of suicide risk.

This evidence-based program will show educators how and when to express concern and refer students to counseling staff or administration. The training is clear, simple, and it can save lives.

**Training includes:**

- A close look at the most common mental health problems and how they typically present in a school setting
- Real-world scenarios in an elementary, middle and high school setting to help you better identify students in need of help
- An online assessment tool to ensure that all participants have gained an understanding of the material covered
- Resources for understanding a school's role in suicide prevention
- Review of legal requirements for schools to keep in mind

*Signs Matter: Early Detection* fulfills many state requirements for educators to have two hours of instruction on suicide prevention.

Purchase today at [www.legalonenj.org/signsmatter](https://www.legalonenj.org/signsmatter).

**RUTGERS** University Behavioral Health Care | **LEGAL ONE** the leader in school law training | **AMERICAN FOUNDATION FOR Suicide Prevention** | [afsp.org](https://afsp.org)



For  
Emergencies  
**Call 911**

# Accessing Help 24/7



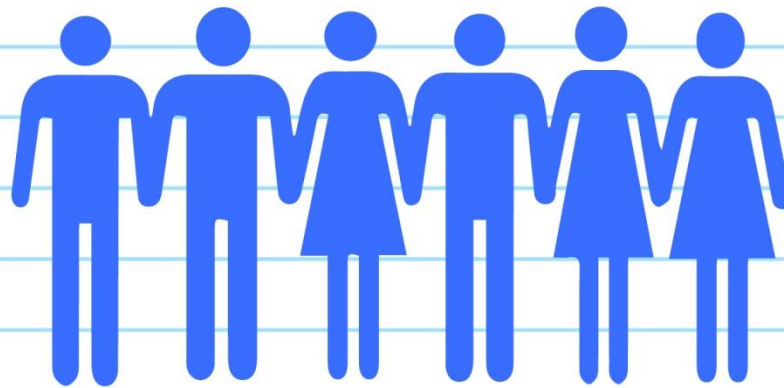
Suicide Prevention  
Lifeline

**Call 1-800-273-TALK**

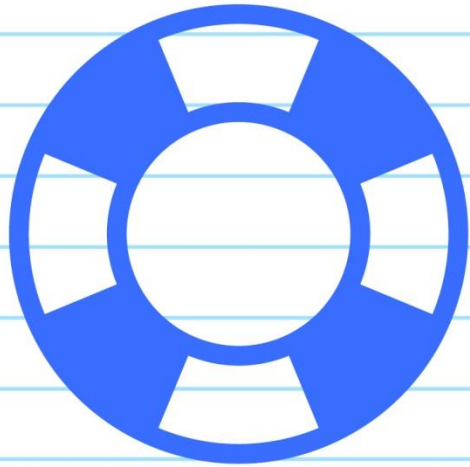
Crisis Text Line

**Text TALK to 741741**

We can create a culture that's  
**smart** about **mental health**  
and **suicide prevention.**







**American  
Foundation  
*for* Suicide  
Prevention**

[afsp.org](https://afsp.org)

# RESOURCES

1. [https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.texasnurses.org/resource/resmgr/toolkits/Suicide\\_Prevention\\_Resource\\_.pdf](https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.texasnurses.org/resource/resmgr/toolkits/Suicide_Prevention_Resource_.pdf)
2. <https://afsp.org/our-work/education/more-than-sad/>
3. [www.youthsuicidewarningsigns.org](http://www.youthsuicidewarningsigns.org)
4. <https://www.sprc.org/resources-programs/after-suicide-toolkit-schools>.
5. <https://store.samhsa.gov/product/Preventing-Suicide-A-Toolkit-for-High-Schools/SMA12-4669>