

Maine Suicide Prevention Program

Tips for Keeping Your Child Safe

2022

Suicide risk among youth has been increasing over the past decade in Maine and in the USA. Though the number of suicide deaths declined in 2019, it had been increasing for the 10 years prior. In 2019, 1 in 6 high school students reported seriously thinking about suicide in the past year and 1 in 11 reported making a suicide attempt. When suicide risk increases it is vital that parents take action to keep their child safe.

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT YOUTH SUICIDE?

Risk factors for exhibiting suicidal behavior:

- A significant loss in their life
- Previous suicide of a peer or family member
- Family and personal stress
- Substance Use increased or excessive
- Depression and other mental health issues
- Problems at school or in the community
- Access to weapons or other means of harming oneself
- Questions regarding sexual orientation/ gender ID

Students who are having suicidal thoughts may exhibit a variety of **warning signs** including, but not limited to:

- Significant changes in behavior such as change in appearance, decline in grades, withdrawing from friends, changes in eating or sleeping habits.
- Making suicidal threats – either direct “I want to die” or indirect “Things would be better if I weren’t here. You’d be better off without me.”
- Appears sad or hopeless, or explosive
- Anxious or agitated
- Showing reckless behavior
- With Self-inflicted injuries
- Giving away prized possessions
- Saying goodbye to friends and family
- Sense of purposelessness
- Victim of bullying or bullying behavior

It is important to remember that the warning signs and risk factors listed are generalities. Not all students who contemplate or die by suicide will exhibit these kinds of symptoms AND not all students who exhibit these behaviors are suicidal; they are invitations to check-in with the person. Be more alert for someone very private and uncommunicative.

WHAT CAN I DO TO KEEP MY CHILD SAFE?

- **ASK.** Talking about suicide does not make a student suicidal. Response to warning signs by asking if someone is thinking about killing themselves gives him/her permission to talk about it. Asking sends the message that you are concerned and want to help. Asking is exactly what you should do! Invite the conversation! And if not you, find someone who can ask and who the youth respects.
- **LISTEN.** When you ask, then listen to what they say. Avoid making statements such as “I know what it’s like” or “I understand.” Instead make statements such as “Help me understand what life is like for you right now.” Or “Tell me where it hurts and how I can help.”
- **TAKE SIGNS SERIOUSLY.** Studies have found that more than 75% of people who die by suicide showed some of the warning signs in the hours, days or weeks prior to their death. Act if you see them.

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- **GET HELP and ACT NOW!** If you have concerns that your child is suicidal, seek immediate help from a mental health professional. Suicidal youth need to be evaluated by an expert in assessing risk and responding to ensure safety. Parents can contact school counselors/social workers for a listing of resources or call the **Maine Crisis Line (1-888-568-1112)** directly to make an appointment. Tell the person on the phone that your child is suicidal and needs to be seen as soon as possible.
- **LIMIT ACCESS TO FIREARMS, PRESCRIPTION DRUGS, MEDICATIONS AND OTHER MEANS.** Impulsivity plays a significant role in youth suicide attempts. If you have any concern about the suicide risk of your child it is vital that any access to lethal means be restricted immediately. Any firearms must be safely locked up in a gun safe or other safe container or removed from the home until the crisis passes. The same is true for medication that can be lethal. This is not gun control; it is responsible gun ownership.
- **DO NOT LEAVE HIM OR HER ALONE.** It is important that parents surround themselves with a team of supportive friends or family members who can step in and help as needed. The crisis will pass, so this level of support will be time limited.

KNOW AND BE READY TO USE EMERGENCY RESOURCES:

Maine Crisis Hotline

Suicide Prevention Lifeline
Police

1-888-568-1112. Call, Text or Chat 24/7

1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255)
911

For more information about depression and suicide:

American Association of Suicidology

www.suicidology.org

NAMI Maine 1-800-464-5767

www.namimaine.org

American Academy of Pediatrics

www.aap.org

- **REASSURE YOUR CHILD THAT HELP IS AVAILABLE & LIFE CAN AND DOES GET BETTER.** Many suicidal people have lost all hope that life can improve. The pain they feel seems unbearable and they see suicide as a way to end their pain. They may have difficulty problem solving even simple issues. Remind your child that no matter how bad things are the problem can be worked out. Offer hope and your help. Suicide prevention works!



Suicide Prevention
at
NAMI Maine

Maine Suicide Prevention Program

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800-464-5767, ext. 2318

www.namimaine.org/suicideprevention