



# Protecting Our Youth: A Community Approach to Suicide Prevention

Suicide remains a critical concern for our young people, and Connecticut has seen several untimely deaths among our youth this summer. **In 2022, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported suicide as the second leading cause of death for youth.** The 2023 Connecticut School Health Survey (grades 9-12) indicates that suicide is a concern amongst Connecticut students and that 16% of youth reported seriously considering suicide, and 8% reported that they had attempted suicide within the last year.

**This survey data also indicates that:**

- **51%** of high school students felt they do not have a trusted adult that they can speak to
- **28%** of high school students reported having poor mental health in the last 30 days
- **35%** of high school students felt sad or hopeless in the last two weeks

There are many factors that lead to suicide, however things to consider include:

- Experiences of Pain/Distress plus feelings of Hopelessness can lead towards Risk of Suicidal Ideation
- Lack of Connectedness and Having the Means to Self-Harm can lead to Risk of a Suicide Attempt

Addressing this issue requires a united, informed effort from all community members and we share this alert so everyone can recognize and understand risk factors that can help us intervene early and provide the necessary support to our youth and their loved ones.

**If you are concerned about your child, or notice changes in their feelings, thoughts or behaviors here's what you need to know to help support them effectively:**

### **1. Promote Open Communication:**

- Encourage young people to express their feelings and listen without judgment.
- Create a supportive environment at home, school, and within the community.

### **2. Provide Support and Resources:**

- Offer access to mental health professionals and counseling services.
- Educate about & model coping strategies and the importance of seeking help.
- Become trained as a community helper/gatekeeper to learn to identify individuals who are showing warning signs and help them get the services they need.

### **3. Respond:**

- If a young person is in immediate danger, call emergency services or take them to the nearest emergency room.
- Encourage the youth to contact crisis support lines, calling or texting 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, available 24/7.
- Mobile crisis services can be reached via 988/211 and can respond to you in person wherever you are 24/7.
- You can also visit an Urgent Crisis Center with the young person, available throughout Connecticut.

### **4. Ensure a Safe Environment:**

- Lock up all prescription and over-the-counter medications; keeping only very small amounts accessible as needed.
- Lock up firearms and store the ammunition separately. Be sure that access keys and codes are also secured.
- Encourage safe driving. Limit and monitor vehicle use during times of emotional distress.

Together, we can make a significant impact in preventing youth suicide. If you or someone you know is struggling, remember that help is always available. Let's build a stronger, more supportive community for our youth.

For more information and resources, visit [www.PreventSuicideCT.org](http://www.PreventSuicideCT.org) or contact the national Suicide Prevention and Crisis hotline 988 by calling, chatting or texting.

**Stay informed. Stay supportive. Stay connected.**

## Tips to engage youth in conversation around mental health include:

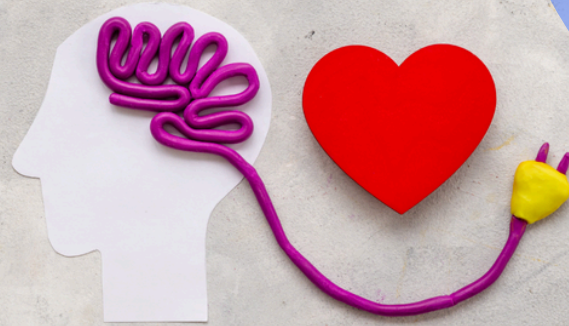


- **Choose the Right Moment:** Find a calm, private time to talk when neither you nor your youth is rushed or in a heightened state of emotion. This can make the conversation more relaxed and open.
- **Use Age-Appropriate Language:** For younger children, simple and concrete terms are best, while older youth might be able to handle more nuanced discussions.
- **Be a Good Listener:** Encourage youth to share their feelings and experiences without interrupting. Show you are listening by reflecting back what they say.
- **Ask Open-Ended Questions:** Use questions that require more than a yes or no answer. For example, "Can you tell me more about that?"
- **Normalize Emotions:** Let your child know that it's normal to have a wide range of feelings. Reinforce that it's okay to talk about these feelings.
- **Validate Their Feelings:** Acknowledge and validate their emotions. Statements like "it sounds like you're feeling really frustrated" can help them feel understood & supported.
- **Be Patient and Consistent:** Conversations about mental health might need to happen over time. Be patient and keep the lines of communication open, showing that you are always available to talk.

## Things to Remember about Youth

- They may not always be able to articulate what they are feeling or why they are feeling a certain way.
- Though they may be in treatment, they may not perceive it as being the type of help they need.
- The brain of a youth is still developing throughout their twenties. Thus, their coping skills and impulsivity are often challenged and limited.
- Grief may show up differently in youth than it does in adults (Pearlman et. al, 2014). It's not uncommon for some youth to express grief as anxiety, anger, frustration, or inability to focus.

# The Importance of Self Care



Stress can impact us all, which can then affect our ability to connect and identify risk and warning signs in others. It is important to practice self-care and seek help so you can persevere, be a trusted adult role model, and support the youth in your life. Develop a self-care plan that addresses your mental and physical health and if you feel that you need professional help, it is important to reach out without hesitation. Self-care is not selfish, it's essential.

If you or someone you know is a suicide loss survivor for supports and resources you can visit:

[www.preventsuicidect.org/resources-for/survivors-of-suicide-loss](http://www.preventsuicidect.org/resources-for/survivors-of-suicide-loss)

## For More Information and Resources Please Visit:

[Prevent Suicide CT \(www.preventsuicidect.org\)](http://www.preventsuicidect.org)

[988 Crisis and Lifeline - CT Website \(www.preventsuicidect.org/get-help/ct-988/\)](http://www.preventsuicidect.org/get-help/ct-988/)

[Connecting to Care CT - Support and Services for CT Youth \(www.connectingtocarect.org/supports-services/\)](http://www.connectingtocarect.org/supports-services/)

[Gizmo's Pawesome Guide to Mental Health \(www.gizmo4mentalhealth.org/\)](http://www.gizmo4mentalhealth.org/)

[CT Chapter of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention \(https://afsp.org/chapter/connecticut\)](https://afsp.org/chapter/connecticut)

