



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION



TO: Superintendents of Schools

FROM: Charlene M. Russell-Tucker, Commissioner of Education
Vannessa Dorantes, Commissioner of Children and Families
Nancy Navarretta, Commissioner of Mental Health and Addiction Services

DATE: January 25, 2024

SUBJECT: Columbia Suicide Severity Rating Scale (C-SSRS)-Recommended Assessment for Determining the Suicide Risk of Students

In 2020, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) reported suicide as the second leading cause of death for youth. The suicide rate for youth ages 10 to 24 increased steadily by 57.4 percent over the years (Curtin, S. C., 2020). In 2021, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimated that there were 224,341 emergency department visits for self-harm among youth and young adults. Since 2015, suicide has been among the top three leading causes of death for youth in the United States and Connecticut (CDC, 2023). According to the Connecticut Violent Death Reporting System, an average of 10 youth under 18 years of age dies by suicide in our state each year.

In the 2021 [Connecticut School Health Survey](#) (grades 9-12), 14.1 percent of youth reported seriously considering attempting suicide and 5.9 percent reported actually attempting suicide. Additionally, youth reported feeling sad or hopeless at increased rates over the past 15 years from 24.8 percent in 2005 to 35.6 percent in 2021. The survey also indicated that among students who reported feeling sad or hopeless, less than a quarter reported getting the kind of help they need with the percentage decreasing from 44.1 percent in 2009 to 22.3 percent in 2021. Furthermore, only 44.3 percent of the high school students reported feeling that they can talk to an adult about their feelings. These data show how important it is to recognize and respond to students' critical mental health needs.

[Public Act 23-167, An Act Concerning Transparency in Education](#), required the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) to provide each local and regional board of education a list of the recommended assessments for determining the suicide risk of students who exhibit mental health distress, have been identified as at risk of suicide, or are considered to be at an increased risk of suicide. In response, the CSDE engaged the Connecticut Suicide Advisory Board chaired by the Department of Children and Families (DCF) and the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS). The Suicide Advisory Board, DCF and DMHAS recommend that the [Columbia-Suicide Severity Rating Scale](#) (C-SSRS) be used as *the* assessment tool for determining the suicide risk of students.

The C-SSRS is a standardized tool that is evidence-supported and is an essential component of a comprehensive suicide prevention program. It helps providers identify individuals who may be at risk and implement appropriate care plans. A positive screen is typically followed by a comprehensive suicide risk assessment and safety planning if warranted.

The CSDE, DCF, and DMHAS recommend that every school district develop a well-coordinated approach to suicide prevention planning. A coordinated approach to serving students can provide the framework for families, community-based partners, and schools to work together to identify students earlier and provide support for mental health issues. Also, please review [Section 80 of Public Act 23-167](#),

which requires districts to revisit the district's written policy and procedures for youth suicide prevention and youth suicide attempts.

Below please find additional national and state resources to support these efforts. If you have questions or need further clarification or information, please contact CSDE's Kimberly Traverso at kimberly.traverso@ct.gov.

Resources for Providers

[CALM \(Counseling on Lethal Means\) Training](#)

[Columbia Protocol \(C-SSRS\) FAQ](#)

[Columbia Suicide Severity Rating Scale Trainings](#)

[Safety Plan Template \(for adolescents and up\)](#)

[Suicide Prevention Resources for Behavioral Healthcare Systems \(preventsuicidect.org\)](#)

Resources for All

[Connecticut Suicide Advisory Board](#)

[Connecting to Care CT - Supports and Services](#)

[Connecting to Care CT – Taking Care of Your Mental Health](#)

[Gizmo's Pawesome Guide to Mental Health & Resources](#)

[Urgent Crisis Centers \(UCC\)-English](#)

[Urgent Crisis Centers \(UCC\)-Spanish](#)

Youth in crisis? In CT - Call 211 (press 1 for crisis, 1 for youth)

Call/Text – 988 or chat www.988Lifeline.org

Text CT to 741741 for free 24/7 text crisis support

Reference

Curtin, S. C. (2020). State suicide rates among adolescents and young adults aged 10-24: United States, 2000- 2018. [National Center for Health Statistics, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

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cc: Sinthia Sone-Moyano, Deputy Commissioner, CSDE

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