



Preventing Adult Suicide in Connecticut Caring for Ourselves, Our Families and Our Communities

Connecticut has one of the lowest suicide rates in the United States, but even one death is too many...

From 2021-2023, Connecticut lost about one adult per day to suicide, and it is among the top three leading causes of death for people aged 18-34. The majority of those who died were middle-aged, non-Hispanic, White men. Additionally, among all of those who died by suicide, approximately half were diagnosed with a mental health or substance use disorder, and half were not, but most were perceived to have a depressed mood. As people age, chronic illness and physical pain often also contribute to suicide. However, these losses do not capture the larger group of individuals who are at risk of suicidal ideation/thoughts and attempts. In 2023 alone, Connecticut hospital Emergency Rooms reported over 34,000 visits among adults with suicidal thoughts, and over 5,000 visits among adults who survived a suicide attempt.

Certain factors can increase someone's risk of suicidal thoughts

- Surviving a suicide attempt and having chronic thoughts of suicide
- Being a survivor of suicide loss
- Having an increased sense of being a burden to others
- Increased isolation from others
- Reduced sense of belonging among family, friends and the community
- Diagnosed or undiagnosed mental health disorders, substance use disorders, and gambling disorders
- Chronic medical conditions or disabilities
- Exposure to violence/trauma history
- Justice involved, including child custody and divorce
- Occupations- First Responders, Military/Veterans, Veterinarians, Farmers, Construction Workers, Medical Professionals
- Unemployed, Uninsured/Underinsured, and those with limited access to care due to transportation or cost

Warning Signs that someone may be in mental distress and considering suicide

It is normal for people to feel sad, mad or worried at times, but it is not a normal reaction to these feelings to consider suicide. Sometimes it is difficult to know when we ourselves or others are struggling or in distress. These changes may help clue us in to when our mental health needs urgent attention.

- Changes in eating, sleeping and/or bathing habits
- Reduced interest in things we usually like
- Increased crying, agitation, anxiety, and/or impulsivity
- Reduced energy and self-isolation

What to do if you are concerned about someone

- Talk with them privately
- Ask directly if they are thinking about suicide. It can help to bring it up with questions such as: "Do you ever wish you could fall asleep and not wake up?" and "Do you have thoughts of suicide?" Using a basic screening tool can help guide your questions (see Resources)
- Listen to their explanation and perspective, acknowledge their personal experience and feelings
- Avoid debating the value of life, minimizing their problems or giving advice
- Stay with them, engage other supportive people, and help them keep their environment safe. Reduce access to lethal items- over the counter and prescription medications, sharps, ropes/belts and firearms.
- Help the person access support and/or treatment by calling/texting 988 or chatting at 988lifeline.org. Stay in touch after the immediate crisis is over, during treatment if possible, and after leaving treatment. It is especially important to support the person the two weeks following hospital discharge, just as you would for someone being discharged after heart surgery.



What People Can Do at Home and in their Communities to Help

- **Promote resources materials/media** within communities where people frequent: healthcare settings (especially primary care and specialists), behavioral healthcare settings, colleges, athletic gyms, community centers, town offices, human services, libraries, workplaces, job centers, court houses, police departments, grocery stores, and faith-based community settings.
- **Ensure people know how and where to get help** for themselves and others. Encourage friends and family to prepare and practice how to reach out when they are in distress to prevent a crisis. They can develop a Mental Health Plan listing ways they can care for their own mental health daily and also when in distress, and where to go, and who to contact as needed. Let them know you are a trusted person they can talk to, and contact professionals or 988 when necessary. *Reach out as early and as often as you need; 988 Lifeline services are free and anonymous for all!*
- **Encourage people to contact the 988 Lifeline** by calling or texting 988, or chatting at www.988lifeline.org when experiencing mental health distress. Just as 911 is used to request, police, fire or ambulance services, 988 is used to request mental health and substance use support and services for yourself or others.
- **Learn how to recognize and respond to warning signs** of a person in distress by attending training in your community, and host training opportunities at work and in your community.
- **Use what is proven to work** in health and behavioral healthcare settings. There are evidence-based strategies that can be used to screen, assess and provide treatment to people struggling with suicidal thoughts.
- **Staying safe at home, is very important.** If someone is struggling with suicidal thoughts, it is extremely important to reduce access to potentially lethal items. Lock up all prescription and over-the-counter medications; keeping only very small amounts accessible as needed. Lock up firearms and store and lock the ammunition separately; also be sure that access keys and codes are also locked up. With State Police permission, you may also transfer firearms to remove them from the house. Lock up sharps (e.g. knives), ropes and belts. Encourage safe driving, limiting use/access to monitor vehicles during times of emotional distress. Lock up/limit access to substances that may reduce inhibitions and increase impulsivity. *Reducing access to lethal items is one of the most effective ways to prevent suicide.*
- **Have protocols in place at work** that support people struggling with their mental health that guide co-workers on how to support them and what to do.
- **Develop and activate suicide prevention and response planning** with key community partners (e.g. municipal offices, mobile crisis, first responders).
- **If you have concerns about someone, do not wait to engage them.** Asking someone if they are thinking of suicide will not give them the idea. Either they are considering suicide or they are not. Talking with someone often relieves their stress and helps them connect to needed care. You may very well save their life!



Community Suicide Prevention

Preventing suicide requires an approach involving various efforts among communities and organizations working together to address the problem. The Comprehensive Approach to Suicide Prevention includes nine strategies that help to prevent suicide and also promote mental health. Each strategy includes programs, policies, practices and services that may be used in different types of settings. For more information, visit: www.sprc.org/effective-prevention/comprehensive-approach

Resources:

- **Prevent Suicide CT** - www.preventsuicidect.org
- **988 Crisis and Lifeline - CT Website** - www.preventsuicidect.org/get-help/ct-988/
- **Columbia Screening Tool**
<https://cssrs.columbia.edu/the-columbia-scale-c-ssrs/families-friends-and-neighbors/>
- **Adult Action Line & Crisis Services**
<https://portal.ct.gov/dmhas/programs-and-services/finding-services/crisis-services>
- **CT Chapter of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention** - www.afsp.org/chapter/connecticut
- **Gizmo's Pawesome Guide to Mental Health** www.gizmo4mentalhealth.org

