National Suicide Prevention Month: Suicide Awareness

September is Suicide Prevention Awareness Month, a month dedicated to educating, learning, and raising awareness about the topic of suicide. For many, suicide is a topic that makes them feel uncomfortable. While it can certainly be a scary topic for many, it is a topic we must continue to talk about. The less stigmatized the issue of suicide becomes, the better chance we have of helping those affected by suicide- granting a newfound hope, education, and openness around the subject.

# **What is Depression?**

Most people who have died by suicide have a mental health condition. One of the most common mental health conditions related to suicide is depression. Depression is a common but serious mental health disorder that negatively impacts a person’s mood, motivation levels, behaviors, thoughts, relationships, emotions, and overall quality of life. While depression can be a severe mental health disorder to experience, it is also a mental health disorder that is considered to be treatable. Understanding the signs and symptoms of depression may be crucial in helping prevent one from experiencing suicidal thoughts.

# **Depression Symptoms**

The symptoms of depression can vary significantly from one person to another. However, one can watch out for a few common signs and symptoms. These [include](https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/depression):

* Low moods- feeling sad, numb, hopeless, or pessimistic
* Increased irritability
* Changes to eating and sleeping habits
* Decreases in one’s feeling of self-worth
* Feeling guilty or helpless
* Loss of motivation
* Lack of interest in things that once brought joy
* Experiencing a lack of energy
* A “foggy” mind- struggling to concentrate, think, learn, or make decisions
* Aches and pains that cannot be explained by a physical condition
* Suicidal thoughts or behaviors

As we stated before, each and every person will experience depression in a different way. Some people may experience a few mild symptoms, while others may experience more symptoms more severely.

# **Know the Warning Signs**

Thoughts of suicide can be devastating and terrifying. Knowing the warning signs can allow those affected by these thoughts to seek the help they may need. These warning signs can [include](https://www.nami.org/About-Mental-Illness/Common-with-Mental-Illness/Risk-of-Suicide):

* Turning to substances such as drugs and alcohol
* Increased irritability or aggressiveness
* Social withdrawal
* Intense mood swings
* Increasingly reckless behaviors

When suicidal thoughts begin to turn toward suicidal behaviors, immediate help from a health care professional is needed. If you believe that you or a loved one may be at risk of suicide, the number 988 is the [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](https://www.fcc.gov/sites/default/files/988-fact-sheet.pdf). This number is intended to be used by anyone who needs to call, text, or chat with a trained counselor when they are at risk of suicide or experiencing mental health-related distress.

The warning signs that one may be in immediate danger of suicide are:

* Discussing a desire to die or kill themselves
* Acting recklessly and putting their life in immediate danger- examples of this include drinking and driving or driving at a dangerous speed
* Talking about a lack of hope or feeling that they have no reason to be alive
* Increased discussions or thoughts about death
* Placing their affairs in order- examples include writing a will, paying off debts, giving away their most prized possessions, and working to check items off their bucket list quickly
* Social withdrawal
* Feeling immense, unbearable pain- both physically and emotionally
* Feeling as though the world would be better without them
* Saying goodbye to those they love
* Researching and planning for suicide

It is crucial to note that any thoughts or ideas of suicide should be discussed with a health professional immediately. If you or someone you know can relate to any of these signs and symptoms, reach out for help as soon as possible.

# **Ways to Help a Loved One in Pain**

If you are worried about a friend or family member, chances are you are seeking methods to help them. One of the ways you can help a loved one open up about their painful thoughts is by asking them the uncomfortable questions. According to the [National Institute of Mental Health](https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/suicide-prevention), asking at-risk individuals if they are experiencing suicidal thoughts may be more helpful than you would believe.

If you are worried a loved one may be planning to harm themselves, removing objects they may decide to use from their space can also be a great way to protect them. Helping the individual reach out to a health care professional can be a crucial step to helping a friend who is experiencing deep psychological pain. If you believe that your loved one is in immediate danger of suicide, helping them reach out to the National Suicide & Crisis Lifeline (988) may be critical.

On top of these actions, one of the best things you can do for a loved one who is experiencing emotional pain is to be there for them. Be there to listen to the thoughts and emotions that are causing them pain and do your best to help them feel validated and supported as they work through them. Continue to reach out and check in with them, even when the worst part seems to be over. Having a friend who leaves you feeling loved and supported can be critical to those experiencing emotional pain.

# **How Can I Help Raise Suicide Awareness?**

For far too long, mental health and suicide have been a taboo subject. This has caused many people to feel ashamed or afraid of sharing the thoughts and feelings that are causing them harm. As a society, we must work to remove this stigma, allowing those experiencing distressing thoughts to feel confident in reaching out for the help they need and deserve.

A few ways you can partake in removing the stigma and helping to raise suicide awareness include:

## **Educating Yourself**

Before you can do the work to educate others, you must put in the work to educate yourself on the subject of mental health and suicide. There is a multitude of resources available in libraries and on the internet. Put in some time to research the topic so you can share a wealth of good-quality information with your community.

## **Educating Your Community**

Spreading awareness to those you see in your everyday life can begin a chain reaction, spreading awareness to more and more ears as individuals share the information they have learned from you. You can spread the word to your community by volunteering to speak on the subject at events, sharing accurate and useful information on your social media, and simply sharing information with your friends and family members.

## **Opening Up About Your Own Mental Health**

Speaking about your own mental health wins and struggles can seem intimidating at first, especially if you have been raised to believe mental health to be a taboo subject. However, the more people who openly talk about their mental health, the weaker the stigma surrounding the subject will become. While you don’t have to share everything, sharing the pieces of your mental health you feel comfortable doing so just may help others begin to open up about their struggles, as well.

## **Volunteering or Donating to Organizations Working to Change the Way the World Views Mental Health**

There is a ton of great organizations working to fight the stigma around the subject of mental health and suicide. Volunteering your time or donating your money to these organizations will grant them a better chance at changing this world for the better.

# **We Are Here for You**

If you or a loved one are struggling with immense emotional pain, depression, or another mental health concern, our counselors are here for you. [Contact](https://michiganpsychologicalcare.com/contact.php) us today, and we will connect you with a caring, compassionate mental health professional who will work with you to get through these difficult thoughts and emotions.

**References**

<https://www.nami.org/About-Mental-Illness/Common-with-Mental-Illness/Risk-of-Suicide>

<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/depression>

<https://www.fcc.gov/sites/default/files/988-fact-sheet.pdf>

<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/suicide-prevention>

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