



THE ROLE OF MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT IN SUICIDE PREVENTION

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SUICIDE PREVENTION MONTH

The Role of Mental Health Support in Suicide Prevention

Strategies and Resources

Suicide affects people at all stages of life and is a global issue, with 77% of cases occurring in low- and middle-income countries. In 2019, it was the fourth leading cause of death among 15–29-year-olds. Nearly 20% of suicides were linked to pesticide poisoning. While mental health issues like depression and alcohol use are common factors in high-income countries, many suicides are impulsive, triggered by crises such as loss, loneliness, financial strain, or abuse. Unfortunately, stigma often prevents individuals from seeking help, leaving a lasting impact on families and communities.



The Importance of Mental Health Support

- 1. Early Intervention and Treatment:** Many individuals who die by suicide suffer from untreated mental health conditions, particularly depression and anxiety. The WHO reports that depression is the leading cause of disability worldwide, affecting over 280 million people. Early diagnosis and treatment of mental health disorders, through therapy or medication, have proven to lower the risk of suicidal ideation.
 - 2. Counseling and Crisis Intervention:** Access to mental health professionals, such as psychologists, psychiatrists, and counselors, allows individuals in crisis to receive immediate help. Crisis helplines, like those offered by the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (1-800-273-8255 in the U.S.), have been shown to prevent suicide. In fact, research from Lifeline indicates that 80% of suicidal individuals who seek help through helplines do not go on to make an attempt.
 - 3. Addressing Impulsive Suicide Attempts:** Many suicides occur impulsively, triggered by acute stress, such as relationship breakups, financial crises, or personal loss. Access to mental health professionals can help individuals manage these stressors before they reach a critical point. For instance, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is effective in helping people reframe negative thought patterns, reducing impulsive actions.
 - 4. Combatting Stigma:** One of the greatest barriers to suicide prevention is the stigma surrounding mental health. According to the WHO, nearly two-thirds of people with mental health disorders never seek professional help due to shame, fear of discrimination, or lack of access. Public awareness campaigns and community support programs aim to reduce stigma, encouraging more individuals to seek mental health care early.
 - 5. Suicide Prevention in Vulnerable Populations:** Certain groups are at a higher risk of suicide, including LGBTQ+ individuals, those in conflict zones, and people living in low- and middle-income countries. Mental health support systems, tailored to these vulnerable populations, are vital. The Trevor Project, for example, reports that LGBTQ+ youth who have access to supportive spaces are 40% less likely to attempt suicide.
 - 6. The Role of Governments and Health Systems:** Governments play a key role in suicide prevention by funding mental health services, training healthcare workers to recognize signs of suicidal behavior, and implementing national strategies. Countries like Japan and Australia, which have implemented comprehensive suicide prevention strategies including mental health support, have seen a decline in suicide rates.
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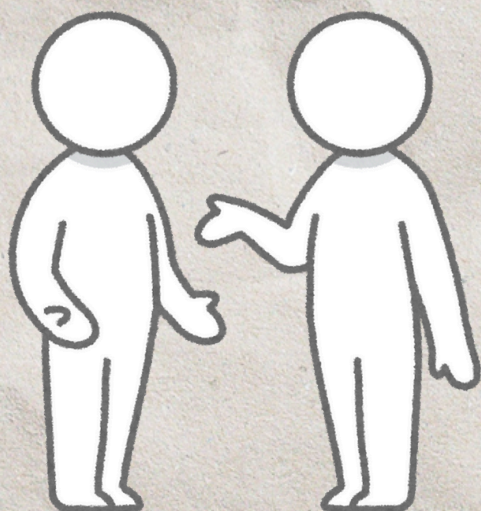
Strategies and Resources

Effective suicide prevention is comprehensive: it requires a combination of efforts that work together to address different aspects of the problem.

The model below shows ten strategies that form a comprehensive approach to suicide prevention and mental health promotion. Each strategy is a broad goal that can be advanced through an array of possible activities (i.e., programs, policies, practices, and services)

1. Recognize warning signs

- Look for verbal cues: Talking about wanting to die, feeling hopeless, being a burden to others, or having no reason to live.
- Observe behavioral changes: Increased alcohol or drug use, withdrawing from activities, isolating from family and friends, sleeping too much or too little, visiting or calling people to say goodbye, giving away prized possessions, aggression.
- Note mood changes: Depression, anxiety, loss of interest, irritability, humiliation/shame, agitation/anger, relief/sudden improvement.



2. Ask directly about suicide

- Be direct and clear: "Are you thinking about suicide?" or "Are you having thoughts of ending your life?"
- Avoid judgmental language or euphemisms that might obscure your intent.
- Prepare for the answer: Be ready to listen and respond calmly, no matter the answer.
- Remember Asking about suicide does not put the idea in someone's head; it often provides relief and an opportunity to get help.

3. Listen without judgment

- Practice active listening: Give your full attention, maintain eye contact, and use supportive body language.
- Validate their feelings: Acknowledge their pain without minimizing or dismissing it.
- Avoid offering solutions or trying to "fix" their problems immediately.
- Use empathetic phrases like "I hear you," "That sounds really difficult," or "I'm here for you."



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4. Remove access to lethal means

- Identify potential means: This could include firearms, medications, sharp objects, or household chemicals.
- Temporarily remove or safely store these items: For firearms, consider off-site storage or using gun locks.
- For medications: Ask a pharmacist about safe disposal of unneeded medications and proper storage of necessary ones.
- Create a safer environment: Remove or secure items that could be used for self-harm, like ropes or cords.



5. Connect to professional help

- Provide resources: Offer contact information for local mental health professionals, crisis hotlines, or support groups.
- Assist with appointments: Offer to help make calls or accompany them to appointments.
- Encourage continuity of care: If they're already in treatment, support them in maintaining their appointments and medication regimen.
- Know emergency options: Be aware of local emergency psychiatric services or hospital emergency departments.

6. Create a safety plan

- Develop it collaboratively: Work with the person to create a plan they feel comfortable using.
- Include warning signs: Help them identify personal signs that a crisis may be developing.
- List coping strategies: Include activities or techniques that have helped in the past.
- Identify supportive contacts: Include friends, family, professionals, and hotlines they can reach out to.
- Ensure accessibility: Make sure the plan is easily accessible, perhaps as a card in their wallet or a note on their phone.



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7. Follow up regularly

- Set reminders: Schedule regular check-ins, especially after critical events or transitions.
- Vary communication methods: Use calls, texts, or in-person visits to maintain contact.
- Be persistent but respectful: If they don't respond, don't give up, but also respect their boundaries.
- Ask specific questions: Inquire about their mood, sleep patterns, and any changes since your last contact.

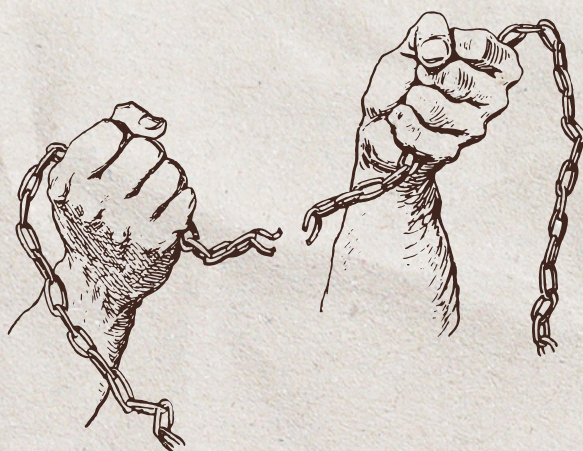


8. Promote social connections

- Encourage group activities: Suggest joining clubs, volunteer organizations, or support groups.
- Foster existing relationships: Help them reconnect with friends or family members.
- Create opportunities for interaction: Organize social events or outings.
- Highlight the importance of connection: Discuss how social support can positively impact mental health.

9. Teach coping skills

- Introduce mindfulness techniques: Teach basic meditation or deep breathing exercises.
- Promote physical activity: Encourage regular exercise, even if it's just short walks.
- Explore creative outlets: Suggest journaling, art, music, or other forms of self-expression.
- Develop problem-solving skills: Help them break down problems into manageable steps.



10. Reduce stigma

- Educate others: Share accurate information about mental health and suicide.
 - Use appropriate language: Avoid phrases like "committed suicide" (use "died by suicide" instead).
 - Share stories of hope: Highlight examples of people who have overcome suicidal thoughts.
 - Encourage open dialogue: Create safe spaces for discussions about mental health.
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Helpline

Here are some of the current suicide prevention helplines in India:

1. Kiran Helpline: 1800-599-0019 (24/7)

Managed by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, this helpline addresses mental health issues including suicidal thoughts.

2. AASRA: 91-22-27546669 (24/7)

Provides confidential support for those in emotional distress and suicidal crises.

3. Sneha Foundation (Chennai): 91-44-24640050 (24/7)

Offers round-the-clock assistance and emotional support.

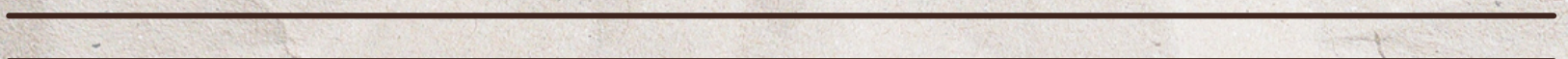
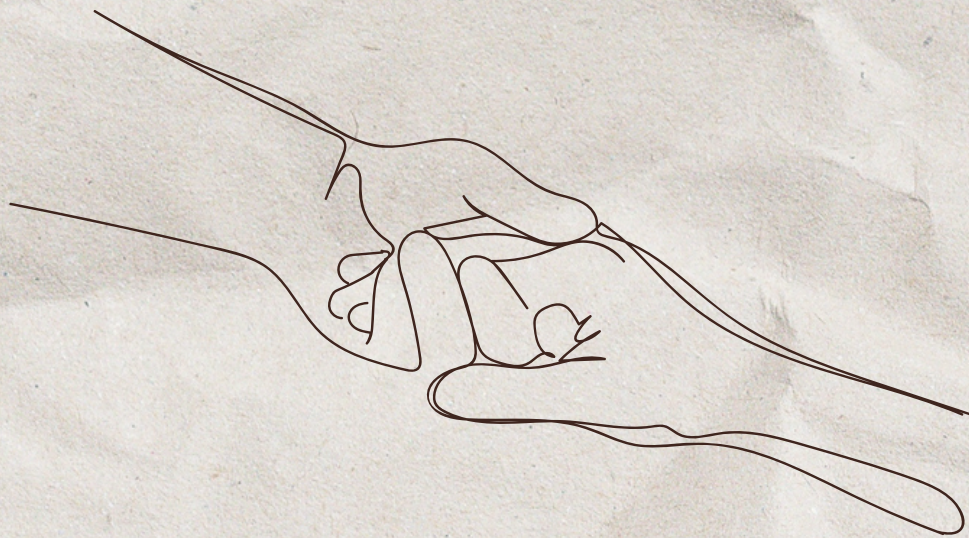
4. iCall (Tata Institute of Social Sciences): 91-9152987821 (Monday-Saturday, 10 AM to 8 PM)

Provides free telephone and email-based counseling.

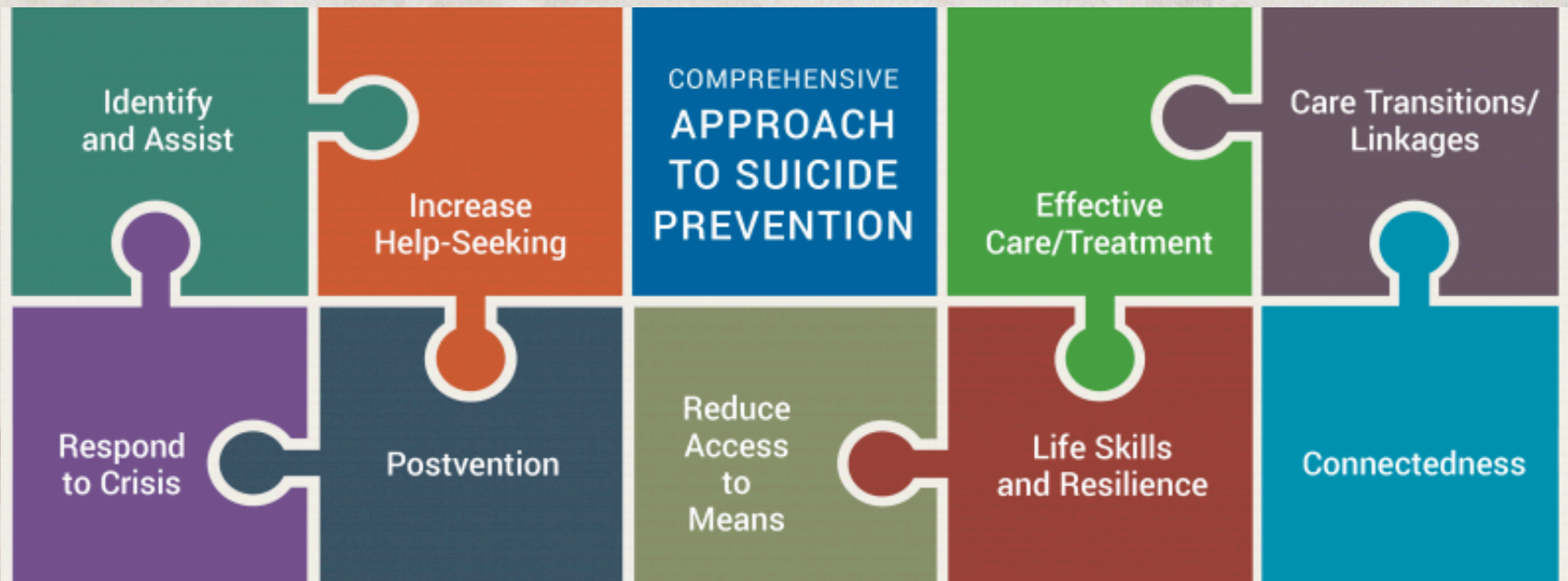
5. Vandrevala Foundation: 9999666555 (24/7)

Offers phone and WhatsApp-based emotional support and psychological counseling.

These helplines provide confidential, professional support to individuals dealing with mental health crises or suicidal thoughts.



Strategies and Resources



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