



## 2018 Washington State Healthy Youth Survey

### *Guide to Information and Resources: Mental Health*

#### **About the Washington State Healthy Youth Survey**

The Washington State Healthy Youth Survey (HYS) is a crucial source of information on adolescent health, behaviors, and perceptions. In fall 2018, over 230,000 students participated in this biennial statewide school-based survey. Over 900 schools administered the survey, representing all 39 Washington counties and 228 school districts.

With the information collected from this anonymous survey, we can:

- Gain an understanding of the health risks students are experiencing.
- Identify trends in order to plan and evaluate initiatives to address risk and protective factors.
- Develop policies and improve programs to better serve youth.

Suicide was the leading cause of death of Washington youth between 15 and 19 years old in 2017. According to vital statistics data from the Department of Health, 76 teens age 15-19 died by suicide in 2017.

#### **Risks for teen depression and suicide**

Suicide is complicated and involves the interplay of multiple risk factors. In teens, the behavioral health conditions most closely linked to suicide risk are major depressive disorder, bipolar disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, conduct disorder, eating disorders, and substance abuse problems. Other key risk factors for suicide include the following:

- Personality characteristics, such as hopelessness, low self-esteem, impulsivity, risk-taking, and poor problem-solving or coping skills.
- Family characteristics, such as family history of suicidal behavior or mental health problems, death of a close family member, and problems in the parent-child relationship.
- Childhood abuse, neglect, or trauma.
- Stressful life circumstances, such as physical, sexual, and/or psychological abuse; breaking up of a romantic relationship; school problems; bullying by peers; trouble with the law; and suicide of a peer.
- Access to lethal means, especially in the home.
- History of previous suicide attempts, depression, or other mental illness.
- Alcohol or drug abuse.

It is important to remember that the vast majority of teens who experience even very stressful life events do not become suicidal.

#### **Factors that help youth remain resilient to mental health challenges**

- Support and encouragement from parents/guardians and other family members, friends, school professionals, and other caring adults in the community.
- Feeling that there are people who believe in them, care about them, and whom they can talk to about important matters.
- Safe communities and learning environments.
- Self-esteem, a sense of control and responsibility, and problem-solving and coping skills.
- Having an outlet for self-expression and participation in after-school activities.

#### **How we can help teens who feel anxious or depressed, and prevent suicide**

##### Parents/guardians and other adults:

- Bond with them: Love them unconditionally, tell them you value them, and stay involved in their lives.
- Talk with teens about their feelings and show you care. Listen to their point of view. Suicidal thinking often comes from a wish to end psychological pain.

- Help teens learn [effective coping strategies](#) and [resiliency skills](#) to deal with stress, expectations of others, relationship problems, and challenging life events.
- Have an evening as a family where everyone creates their own [mental health safety plans](#), even before a crisis. There are examples for [teens](#) and [younger children](#).
- Learn about warning signs and where to get help; you don't need to handle this alone.
- Ask: "Are you thinking about suicide?" Don't be afraid that talking about it will give them the idea. If you've observed any warning signs, chances are they're already thinking about it.
- If you own a firearm, keep it secured where a teen could not access it. Lock up medications they shouldn't have access to.

### Communities and schools:

Each sector of our communities can play a role in building an environment that supports youth. Some ways to do that are:

- Start or join a coalition that works to keep youth healthy and safe.
- Break the stigma and reduce fear around talking about mental health and suicide. Provide messages of hope and recovery so youth know help is available.
- Educate community members and parents/guardians about the facts around youth anxiety, depression, and suicide. See below for links to resources.
- Teach youth how to respond and where they can find help if a friend is struggling with stress, anxiety, and depression and/or having suicidal thoughts; friends are often the first to know. [Seize the Awkward campaign](#) educates youth on how to talk to friends about mental health.
- Enforce policies aimed to reduce bullying and support students experiencing bullying.
- Enforce policies and laws around substance use. Youth substance use is often associated with mental health challenges and suicide.
- Provide opportunities for youth to participate in safe and fun activities, learn new skills, and be recognized for their achievements.
- Provide youth with a safe space to hang out.
- Find more ideas in the [Washington State Suicide Prevention Plan](#).

### **Information and resources**

Several websites provide both information and materials that can be downloaded or ordered.

- **For information, help during a crisis, emotional support, and referrals:**
  - [Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#) (1-800-273-TALK)
  - Text "HEAL" to 741741 to reach a trained Crisis Text Line counselor.
  - [How to talk to children about suicide](#)
  - [Trevor Project Lifeline \(LGBTQ\)](#) (1-866-488-7386)
  - [The Washington Recovery Help Line](#) (1-866-789-1511)
  - [TeenLink](#) (1-866-833-6546; 6pm-10pm PST)
- **For further information on mental health and suicide:**
  - [OSPI's Youth Suicide Prevention, Intervention, and Postvention page](#)
  - [DOH's Suicide Prevention page](#)
  - [HCA's Substance Abuse Prevention and Mental Health Promotion strategic plan](#)
  - [Forefront Suicide Prevention](#)
  - [Child Mind Institute](#)
- Visit [www.AskHYS.net](http://www.AskHYS.net) for current and past Healthy Youth Survey data, including fact sheets and frequency reports, on mental health and other topics.