



Office of Integrated
Wellness & Prevention

Connecting to Hope

A Prevention Resource

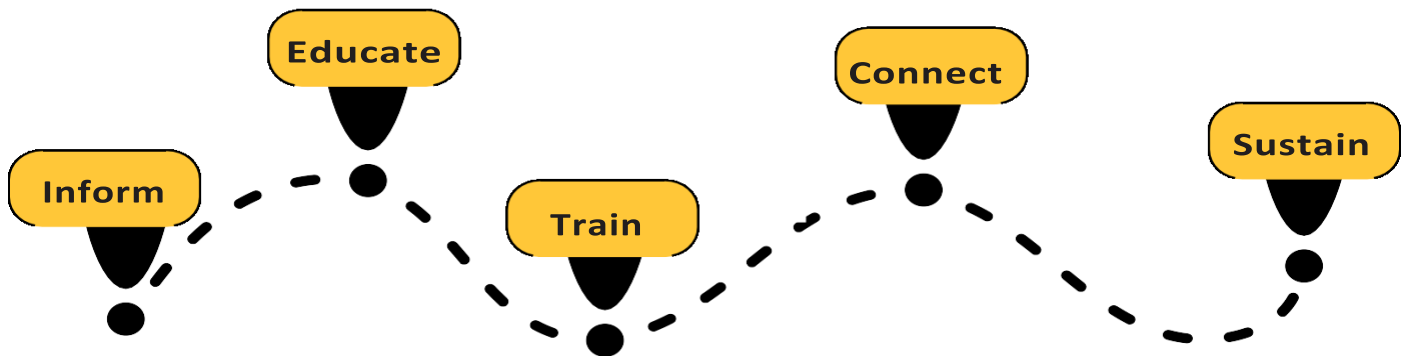
September 2025



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Hope starts here.



Inform:

Learn all about the facts on suicide in Maryland, including warning signs, who is most at risk, and what we can do as a community to prevent suicide.

Educate:

Explore how to create safe spaces and reduce risk. Learn about safety planning, secure storage of lethal means, and how to support someone in crisis.

Train:

Discover suicide prevention trainings like QPR and Mental Health First Aid. Find free tools to build skills and support people in your home or community.

Connect:

See how to get involved through walks, events, campaigns, and partnerships. Learn how Marylanders are working together to promote hope and healing.

Sustain:

Find resources to care for yourself, your community, and your programs over time. Build habits, practices, and systems that support long-term wellness.

Why Connection Matters in Suicide Prevention

Staying connected to others builds trust, reduces isolation, and helps people feel supported before a crisis occurs. Connection creates opportunities to notice when someone is struggling and to link them to help. Check out our “Connect” section!



Introduction

Explore our welcome letter, purpose, why words matter, how language shapes healing, what hope means, and how we can connect to it to save lives.



About Us

At the Maryland Department of Health's Behavioral Health Administration (BHA), we recognize that behavioral health is not a set of isolated issues. It is a complex, interconnected reality that affects individuals, families, and communities across our state. That is why our work is built on integration, not separation.

Our office, formerly the Office of Suicide Prevention, has expanded and evolved into the Office of Integrated Wellness and Prevention.



This name change reflects our commitment to addressing the full spectrum of behavioral health challenges. We focus not only on suicide, but also on problem gambling and substance use, using approaches that are compassionate, community-informed, and culturally responsive.

These issues are deeply connected. All three are influenced by mental health, trauma, economic and housing instability, and other social determinants of health. Addressing them separately creates dangerous gaps in care, which can lead to death by suicide. We aim to treat the whole person, not one risk factor at a time.

Using evidence-based strategies, community partnerships, and a person-centered approach, we are building a Maryland where everyone has access to the care and support they want/need to survive and thrive.

We work across five key pillars to prevent suicide, substance misuse, and problem gambling.

Our Programs at a Glance

Suicide Prevention Program

The Maryland Department of Health’s Suicide Prevention Program works to reduce deaths by suicide and suicide attempts across the state by building comprehensive, systemic support. We inform and educate Marylanders about vital suicide prevention resources, equip communities through training, strengthen connections between individuals and support networks, and promote long-term wellness through sustainable programs and practices. Our work addresses the needs of individuals, families, organizations, and communities through technical assistance, training, and resource sharing.

For information, email mdh.suicideprevention@maryland.gov.



Suicide Prevention Resources and Crisis Support

While our office does not provide direct crisis services, we ensure that vital resources are available to Maryland residents. The 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline is available 24/7 for those in distress, providing confidential support at any time.

Key Resources:

- [988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline – Call or text 988 for immediate support](#)
- [Maryland Action Plan to Prevent Suicide in K-12 Schools](#)
- [Extreme Risk Protection Order \(ERPO\) Toolkit](#)
- [Responding to Suicidal Ideation for Veterans and Service Members](#)
- [Monthly Scoop Newsletter on Suicide Prevention](#)

Community Engagement and Suicide Prevention Training

Suicide prevention is a shared responsibility that requires action at every level, from individuals to schools, workplaces and healthcare systems. The Maryland Department of Health funds suicide prevention education and training programs to equip people with the tools to recognize warning signs, intervene effectively, and connect individuals to care. Check out our “Training” section for more information about these trainings!

Our Programs at a Glance

(Continued)

Problem Gambling Prevention Program

The Maryland Department of Health's Suicide Prevention Program strives to build comprehensive, systemic support to reduce deaths by suicide and suicide attempts throughout the state of Maryland. The office develops and sustains integrated, multi-faceted, diverse supports that focus on the needs of individuals, families, organizations, and communities through technical assistance, training, and resources.

The Maryland Department of Health's Behavioral Health Administration provides funding and oversight to ensure that problem gambling prevention, treatment, and support services are available across the state. Through grant funding, we support the Maryland Center of Excellence on Problem Gambling, housed at the University of Maryland School of Medicine, to lead statewide efforts in prevention, education, and recovery support.

How We Make a Difference:

- Providing free and confidential resources for individuals and families, including the 1-800-GAMBLER hotline and Peer Recovery Support services.
- Expanding awareness campaigns to educate the public on the risks of gambling addiction and responsible gambling practices.
- Providing training for behavioral health professionals, educators, and community members to recognize and address problem gambling.
- Supporting research and public policy efforts to reduce gambling-related harm while providing insights into data and emerging trends.
- [Learn more about problem gambling prevention](#)

Peer Recovery Support for Problem Gambling

As part of Maryland's statewide strategy, we fund Peer Recovery Support Specialists who directly assist individuals struggling with gambling. Peers help reduce barriers to recovery by connecting individuals with services that align with their personal goals.

Our Programs at a Glance

(Continued)

Problem Gambling Prevention Program Continued

How Peer Support Helps:

- One-on-one guidance from trained individuals with lived experience
- Providing connections to financial counseling, treatment services, and behavioral health resources
- Support for individuals and families impacted by gambling addiction
- [Find peer support and recovery resources](#)

State-Funded Gambling Treatment-Maryland ensures that all residents and concerned individuals have access to free and confidential gambling addiction treatment for themselves or their loved ones, regardless of insurance status or financial situation, through state-funded counseling services.

Treatment Includes:

- Individual and family therapy
- Referrals to additional behavioral health and financial support
- [Get help for problem gambling today.](#)

Substance Use Prevention Program

Substance Use Block Grant Prevention Program

Prevention starts with education, awareness, and action. The Substance Use Block Grant funds statewide initiatives that empower youth, families, and communities to make healthier choices.



Our Programs at a Glance

(Continued)

Substance Use Prevention Program Continued

How We Make a Difference:

- Public awareness campaigns on substance misuse risks
- Prevention education for schools and families
- University-led initiatives supporting college students
- Provide opportunities for alternative activities that exclude alcohol and other drugs
- Assess if behavior can be reversed through education
- Ongoing networking activities and technical assistance to community groups or agencies
- Establish or change written and unwritten community standards, codes, and attitudes

For program inquiries, email bha.prevention@maryland.gov and [Explore our prevention programs](#)

Opioid Misuse Prevention Program

Opioid misuse impacts every community, but prevention, treatment, and efforts to reduce risk save lives. The Opioid Misuse Prevention Program provides education, training, and policy support to reduce opioid-related harm.

How We Make a Difference:

- Naloxone training and overdose education
- Safe prescription drug disposal initiatives
- Educational outreach to improve clinical practice and patient outcomes
- Community outreach and harm reduction efforts

For program inquiries, email bha.prevention@maryland.gov and [Get involved in opioid misuse prevention.](#)

Connecting Our Work to Hope



The work of suicide prevention is about people, the relationships we build, the communities we strengthen, and the moments that help us keep moving forward. Our efforts link directly to building hope, because when people feel connected and supported, they are more likely to reach out and find reasons to keep living.

This toolkit is more than information and resources, it's an invitation to create safe spaces where people feel connected, supported, and respected. It begins with connection, and it grows through moments that remind us life can still hold meaning.

Next, we explore what hope is, how it can be developed and strengthened, and how it can guide us toward safety and healing.

What is Hope?



Hope is the belief that something better is possible.

Hope isn't blind optimism or pretending everything is okay. It doesn't erase pain. Hope holds space for the idea that this is not the end of the story. It keeps people going through pain, fear, and uncertainty. Hope is a bridge between despair and action.

Psychologist C.R. Snyder defines hope as having three key elements:

- Goals: Something meaningful to move toward.
- Pathways: Belief that we can find a way.
- Agency: Motivation to keep trying.

This makes hope an active force, not a passive feeling. Hope involves intention, imagination, and movement.^[20]

What Does Hope Look Like?

- Getting out of bed
- Taking a walk after a hard day
- Texting a friend
- Praying, painting, or journaling
- Choosing rest
- Going to a training
- Reaching out for support
- Saving money

What Can Inspire Hope?

- Family or chosen family
- Nature and animals
- Spirituality, prayer, or mindfulness
- Community and social movements
- Kindness from others
- Music, art, and storytelling
- Seeing someone survive or heal
- Helping someone else

This reflects the core of Integrated Wellness and Prevention: the understanding that health is physical, emotional, social, and spiritual. We create safe spaces for hope to grow by honoring the whole person.^[25] Hope lives in moments of connection, safety, and the possibility of healing. We can build it for ourselves and for each other. This toolkit will show you how.

Hope Across the Lifespan

Hope looks different depending on where we are in life. From childhood to older adulthood, how we understand, talk about, and hold onto hope is shaped by our experiences, wants/needs, and the support around us.

Children

"Hope is like planting a seed. You can't see the flower yet, but you believe it will grow. It's your inside light that says, 'Let's try again tomorrow.'"

Children often experience and express distress differently from adults. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, establishing emotional safety and trusted adult relationships helps children build hope and resilience. Trusted adults can foster a child's sense of stability and help them name emotions and imagine future possibilities.^[26]



Teens and Young Adults

"Hope is knowing the world hasn't seen the best of you yet. Even when things feel heavy, hope says: 'You're not done.'"

Adolescents face unique pressures related to identity, belonging, and purpose. Studies show that hope in youth is strongly linked to protective factors like positive adult relationships, community engagement, and access to welcoming environments.^[27]



Older Adults

"Hope doesn't ignore the past, it honors it. And it still believes in the beauty ahead. Hope means your love, your voice, and your presence still matter."

Older adults may face grief, loneliness, or isolation. Yet research shows that when older adults feel connected to meaning, community, and intergenerational relationships, their sense of hope and emotional well-being improves. Engagement in meaningful activities is protective against suicide risk in late life.^[28]



Hope for the Hopeless

Hope does not ignore the bad. It dares to believe things can shift. Even when we feel finished, hope quietly says, ‘Not yet.’ For individuals experiencing deep despair or isolation, small acts of consistent care can create space for hope to re-emerge.

Research shows that trauma-informed, person-centered approaches, grounded in safety, choice, and trust, are vital first steps toward healing and reconnecting to hope.

Why This Matters

- Trauma-informed care helps avoid re-triggering pain. It focuses on emotional and physical safety and emphasizes choice and collaboration. Someone who feels stuck is often responding to past hurt, not weakness.^[33]
- Person-centered support meets people where they are, without judgment or pressure. It validates their experience and affirms their ability to engage again, on their own terms.^[34]
- Showing up with steady compassion, not pushing solutions, can shift perceptions over time. Your presence alone can help someone believe they are not forgotten.^[35]

Approaches That Help Rebuild Hope

- Listen More, Fix Less
- Offer space, not to be fixed, but to be heard.
- Invite, Don’t Force
- Ask open-ended questions like “What do you want/need right now?” to honor autonomy.
- Anchor Connection
- Stay in touch, even if responses are minimal. Consistency builds trust.
- Purpose Through Small Steps
- Encourage any sign of light, sharing a moment, noting a preference, or naming a favorite memory.

What the Research Tells Us

- The National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention highlights that healing begins when people feel heard and believed. Meaningful connection and acknowledgment can disrupt isolation.^[36]
- The American Psychological Association notes that safety, trust, and choice are essential for people who have experienced trauma.^[37]
- Harvard Medical School research underscores that connection, even when brief or indirect, strengthens resilience and reduces risk over time.^[38]

Hope Across Communities

Hope isn't just individual, it is collective. It is built through safe and welcoming spaces, shared traditions, and community care. When we recognize the many ways people connect to hope, especially in groups that face greater challenges, prevention becomes stronger and more effective.

Supportive Environments as Protective Factors

Hope often grows in spaces where people feel respected, accepted, and able to express themselves freely. Environments that foster belonging, honor individual experiences, and provide access to support are known protective factors that can reduce suicide risk.^[29,30] Creating these spaces is a prevention strategy in itself.

Community Strength and Resilience

Communities often carry deep sources of resilience, from common values and stories to wisdom passed down through generations. Celebrating these bonds and shared ways of life can help people feel connected, find meaning, and reinforce the belief that life has value.^[31]

Reducing Barriers and Expanding Access

Geographic, economic, and social barriers can limit access to life-saving behavioral health care and other supports. Expanding outreach, improving access, and strengthening programs can help connect people to the resources they need and want, wherever they live.^[32]

Why Connection Sustains Hope

Being seen and valued reinforces the belief that each person's life matters. Shared practices, traditions, storytelling, music, language, and relationships can carry wisdom and strength across generations. When hope is rooted in these connections, it becomes more than a feeling; it becomes a foundation.

Two Ribbons, One Month

Suicide prevention is represented by two awareness ribbons, each with its own history and meaning. Both honor the complexity of suicide, support those who have been affected, and promote hope and healing.



Teal and Purple Ribbon

What it symbolizes:

- Purple honors those who have died by suicide and the grief of survivors
- Teal supports those living with suicidal thoughts and mental health challenges

Where it is used:

This ribbon is widely used during Suicide Prevention Awareness Month (September) and national campaigns led by groups like the [National Alliance on Mental Illness](#) and the [American Foundation for Suicide Prevention](#).

Why it matters:

The teal and purple ribbon reflects a more inclusive and integrated approach to suicide prevention, recognizing both survival and loss, individual struggle and community strength.



Yellow Ribbon

What it symbolizes:

- Hope, light, and the belief that it's okay to ask for help
- Youth-focused prevention and peer-to-peer support

Where it started:

The yellow ribbon originated in 1994 following the death of 17-year-old Mike Emme in Colorado. His friends and family started the [Yellow Ribbon Suicide Prevention Program](#) to encourage young people to talk openly about mental health and seek help without shame.

Why it matters:

The yellow ribbon has become a powerful message in schools and youth campaigns, reminding us that one conversation can save a life.



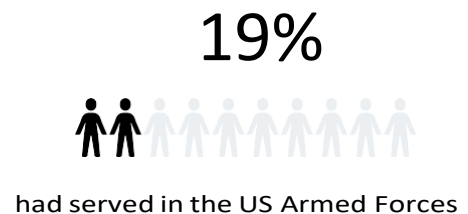
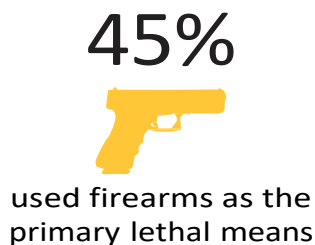
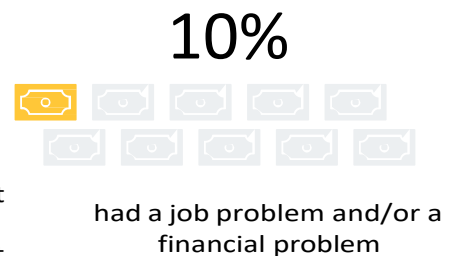
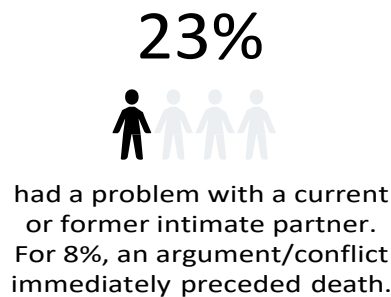
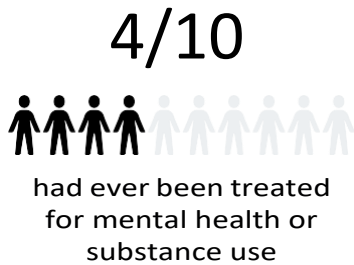
Inform

Accurate and current data can inform prevention efforts, providing evidence to fight stigma and misconceptions. Key data points highlight the impact of suicide in our communities.

Suicide in Maryland: Data Snapshot

Between 2018-2023, an average of 620 Marylanders died by suicide annually.^[1] In 2022, there were 12,382 years of potential life lost to suicide in Maryland.^[1] It is estimated that a single suicide impacts an average of 135 people.^[3]

According to Maryland Violent Death Reporting Systems Data from 2003-2020, of the people who died by suicide...^[7]



Nationally, some communities and groups have elevated risk and/or increasing rates of suicide. In 2022, suicide was the 2nd leading cause of death for ages 10-14. Suicide was the 3rd leading cause of death for ages 15-24 and 25-34.^[2]

- Older men ages 75+ have the highest rates of suicide compared to other age groups.^[17]
- The suicide rate for Black youth ages 10-17 has risen 144% between 2007-2020 even though the overall youth suicide rate has been decreasing.^[4]
- In 2023, the racial/ethnicity group that had the highest rate of suicide in the US was American Indian and Alaska Native people.^[5]
- 39% of LGBTQ young people seriously considered suicide in 2024. Percentages were higher for LGBTQ youth of color.^[6]

Suicide is Preventable

Suicide can be a difficult subject to learn about, but many people have an incomplete or misinformed understanding of suicide. It's important to debunk myths about suicide. Stigma and misconceptions hinder open conversations that can be lifesaving. ^[15]

MYTH

Suicide can't be prevented.

FACT

Suicide is preventable. However, for someone at high risk of suicide, the decision to attempt suicide can happen in a matter of minutes. [8] If someone is displaying warning signs of suicide or worrisome changes in behavior, it is vital to connect them to help immediately.

MYTH

Once someone is suicidal, they will always remain suicidal.

FACT

Active suicidal thoughts is usually time-limited. Research shows that the majority of individuals who survive a suicide attempt do not go on to die by suicide later in life. [15] An individual with suicidal thoughts and/or attempts can recover in the future.

MYTH

Asking someone about suicide directly will encourage them or "plant the idea" to attempt suicide.

FACT

Talking about suicide with someone who is struggling reduces the pressure or fear they may feel. Being open and non-judgmental will allow the person to share honestly, and can be the first step towards connecting to lifesaving help.

Asking the Question

If you are worried about someone, it is important to ask directly about suicide. It may feel uncomfortable, but asking the question can save a life. If you're unsure when to ask, look out for **warning signs** listed below.



What Someone Might Say

- *“I want to die” or “I wish I wasn’t here”*
- *Talking about feeling hopeless, ashamed, or like a burden*
- *Expressing unbearable emotional or physical pain*
- *Mentioning having no reason to live*
- *Talking about seeking revenge or feeling trapped*



What Someone Might Do

- *Searching online for ways to die or accessing lethal means (e.g., firearms, medications)*
- *Giving away personal possessions*
- *Withdrawing from others or isolating*
- *Sleeping too much or too little*
- *Acting recklessly or aggressively*
- *Losing interest in hobbies or school*
- *Showing extreme mood swings or sudden calmness after depression*
- *Using more alcohol or drugs*
- *Performing poorly at work or school*

Warning signs can look different for every person. Ask about suicide directly:

“Are you thinking about suicide?”

“Are you thinking of killing yourself?”

“Are you thinking about ending your life?”

Avoid vague or minimizing phrases like: “are you thinking about hurting yourself?”, “you wouldn’t do anything drastic/stupid, would you?”,

Being direct shows that you are open, willing to listen, and not afraid of the truth.

Remember Your ABCDEs



Ask Directly. Asking someone directly, “are you thinking of suicide?” can be the open door to a conversation that they’ve been needing. Ask the person if they have a plan for suicide, and if they know what they would use to carry out their plan.

Be an Active Listener. Be there to listen with compassion and empathy. Avoid judgmental or dismissive statements. Let the person share their feelings and story. Do not jump to advice-giving, and stay calm.

Continue to Keep Them Safe. Do not leave someone alone if they are thinking about suicide. If applicable, remove what they planned to use (firearms, medications, etc.). If you think the person is in immediate danger, call or text 988. You can also take them to the nearest emergency room or crisis center.

Discuss Options and Connect to Help. Find out who they can reach out to for help, whether it’s a therapist, a doctor, friends or family. For additional support, call or text 988.

Encourage, Support, and Follow Up. Follow-up with the person in the days and weeks after the crisis to let them know you’re thinking of them.

— *To Help Someone Else*

Visit the 988 Lifeline Website.

988lifeline.org/help-someone-else

Lived Experience of Suicide

Safe spaces begin with honoring lived experience. People who have experienced suicide risk, loss, or mental health challenges offer insight that can guide healing. When we center their voices, we create environments where people feel seen, heard, and safe.

People with lived experience of suicide include:

- Individuals who have experienced suicidal thoughts, behaviors, or crisis
- Individuals who have survived a suicide attempt or multiple suicide attempts
- Individuals who have experienced a loss or losses to suicide

Involving individuals with lived experience in suicide prevention

- People who have attempted suicide or have been affected by a suicide death are at higher risk of suicide. Engaging them in their own care has been shown to reduce suicide risk.
- The insights of people with lived experience are extremely valuable in prevention planning, treatment, and education. This leads to improved care, enhanced safety, reduced suicide attempts and deaths, and improved support for loss and attempt survivors.
- The stories of individuals with lived experience are incredibly powerful, can help reduce suicide stigma, and can encourage help-seeking behavior.

After a suicide attempt or suicide loss

- Engage in self-compassion and self-care.
- Seek help from a mental health professional and community resources.
- Talk to those you trust.
- Explore peer support options, including support groups.
- Develop a safety plan.

For Attempt Survivors

Visit the 988 Lifeline Website.

988lifeline.org/help-yourself/attempt-survivor

For Loss Survivors

Visit the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention website.

afsp.org/ive-lost-someone



Educate

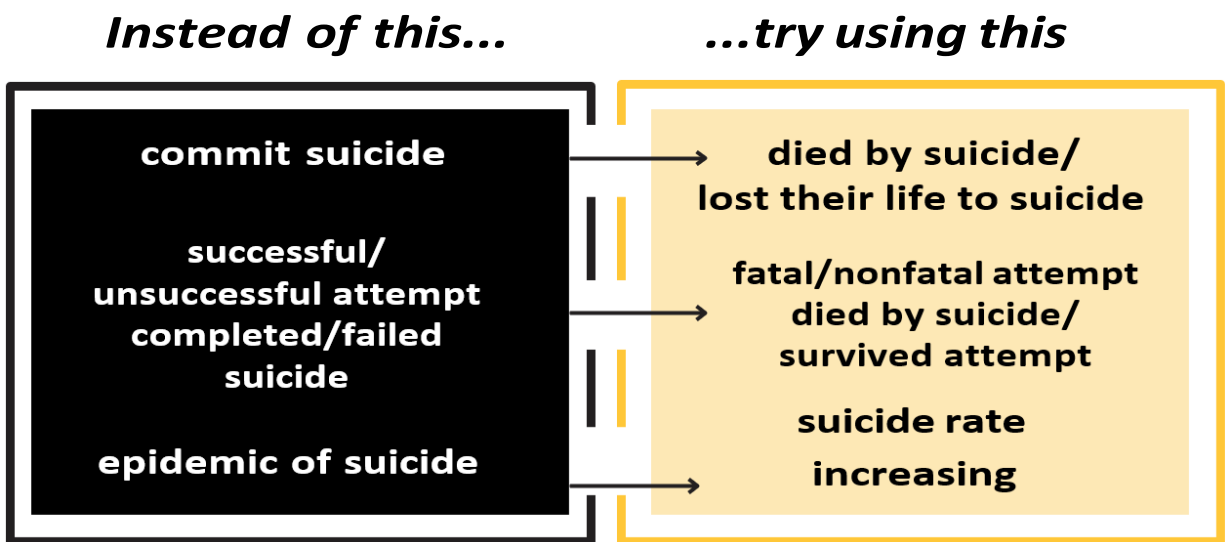
Education is prevention. Learn how integrated wellness approaches from our office can support safer personal and community spaces, promote healing, and help save lives.

Words Matter

How we communicate about suicide - in media, in messaging, and in personal conversations - makes a difference. As you share messages about suicide prevention, consider the impact of the language you use.

Avoid Stigmatizing Language

In general, avoid using language around suicide that reinforces negative stereotypes and prejudice. It's important to emphasize hope and recovery.



Report on Suicide Responsibly.

Media coverage of suicide can be highly impactful. When suicide is sensationalized, it can contribute to increased risk of suicide in the community. When suicide is reported on responsibly, it can actually promote help-seeking for those at risk of suicide.

— For more information

Visit the Reporting on Suicide website.
reportingonsuicide.org

Visit the Canada Centre for Addiction and Mental Health Words Matter website.
camh.ca/en/today-campaign/help-and-resources/words-matter

Safe Spaces for Suicide Prevention



Safe spaces offer places where people feel emotionally and physically secure, respected for who they are, and free to be themselves. These spaces are especially protective against suicide, as they foster connection, reduce judgment, and support healing.

What Makes Safe Spaces Effective?

A recent scoping review reinforces the power of safe spaces in youth mental health. It highlights that environments such as schools, community centers, and online forums provide crucial support through skilled guidance, peer connection, and inclusive policies. Outcomes include reduced anxiety, trauma symptoms, and substance use, along with improved interpersonal relationships and overall well-being.^[40]

Co-designed, peer-led safe spaces are recognized for their value in community mental health settings. These approaches emphasize that people with lived experience bring essential insight into what makes environments genuinely safe and welcoming.^[41]

How Safe Spaces Support Suicide Prevention

- Promote belonging and reduce isolation
- The U.S. Surgeon General has identified loneliness as a key risk factor for suicide. Safe spaces help reverse isolation by fostering connection and trust.^[19]
- Support high-risk populations
- Youth benefit from welcoming, judgment-free spaces. Access to these environments has been linked to lower rates of suicidal thoughts and actions.^[30, 42]

Safe Space Checklist

Safe spaces are created through intention, empathy, and action. They do not need to be perfect to be powerful. People are more likely to engage and healing when they feel supported, respected, and heard. This checklist offers practical guidance for creating environments that foster trust and connection.

Emotional Safety

- People feel accepted as they are
- Values are respected
- There is no judgment or pressure to “fix” someone
- Lived experience is respected and welcomed with care and empathy
- Discomfort, grief, and uncertainty are not dismissed

Communication

- Active listening is encouraged
- Questions are encouraged
- Conversations allow for silence, emotion, and vulnerability
- People are asked what they want/need, not told what to do

Representation and Voice

- Lived experience is reflected in staff, leaders, or facilitators
- Diverse perspectives are invited and valued
- Feedback is invited and acted on
- Programs are co-designed with the people they serve
- The setting reflects real-world challenges and solutions

Boundaries and Privacy

- People can say “no” without pressure
- Confidentiality is clearly communicated and respected
- Physical and virtual space guidelines are clear and supportive
- Clear guidelines help everyone know what to expect

Consistency and Trust

- Support is available regularly, not just during a crisis
- There is transparency about what is offered
- Support continues beyond a single moment or event
- People know where to turn if they need/want more help
- Resources and next steps are easy to access

Safety Planning

A safety plan is a set of resources and instructions that can guide a person during a mental health or substance use crisis. This brief intervention can develop a concrete plan for supporting safety. Although there are clinical safety plans, there are also types of safety planning that can be done with loved ones or individually. Research points to safety planning being effective at reducing suicidal behavior for those who have been hospitalized for suicide-related concerns.^[9]

Safety planning typically includes identifying:

- Warning signs
- Internal coping strategies
- People and places that provide distraction
- People the individual can ask for help during a crisis
- Professionals or agencies the individual can contact during a crisis
- Plans to make the environment safer (lethal means planning)

How Do I Make a Safety Plan?

Safety planning can be done independently, or can be done in partnership with a loved one or mental health professional. There are three important things to remember:

- **Safety planning should not be done during a crisis.** Planning should be done when an individual is stable and in a clear state of mind.
- **Safety plans are NOT contracts.** They are voluntary guidelines developed and driven by the person who is at risk of suicidal crisis.
- **Consulting with a clinician is recommended.** A clinician can provide additional insight and valuable resources. Remember, you can call, text, or chat 988 for additional resources.

— *For Safety Plan Templates*

Visit the My Safety Plan website to access a guided safety plan.

mysafetyplan.org

Download the Suicide Safety Plan mobile app.

suicidesafetyplan.app

Lethal Means Safety

Lethal means are objects (e.g., medications, firearms, sharp instruments) that can be used to seriously harm or kill oneself or others. "Lethal means safety" is an intentional, voluntary practice to reduce suicide risk by limiting access to lethal means.

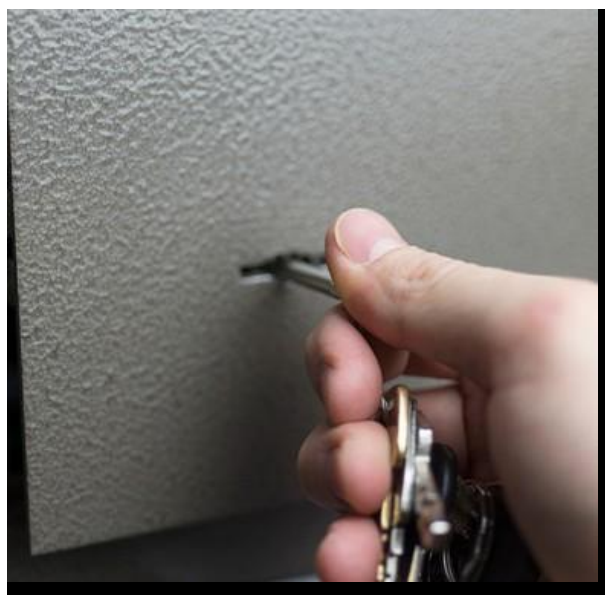
Reducing access to lethal means is an important part of suicide prevention. The lethal means that a person decides to use during a suicidal crisis often depends on what is available. Because there is usually less than an hour between the decision to attempt suicide and the attempt, making means difficult to access can prevent suicide.^[8] Below are tips on how to make your home a safe space.

Firearms

- Use a gunlock
 - Cable, Biometric, etc.
- Take firearms apart and store in a locking case or safe
- Store firearms unloaded and separate from ammunition
- Store firearms away from the house during known crises

Medication

- Purchase medication in "blister packs" or in individual packaging
- Throw out expired/unused medication
- Keep medication in a locked or secured location
- Portion out medication and store excess in a secure location



Ligatures (cords, ropes, etc.)

- Use tear-resistant sheets and bedding
- Use and purchase cordless devices
- Remove or safely store rope or cords

Sharps (knives, blades, etc.)

- Use knife covers
- Keep sharp blades in a secure location
- Remove or substitute for blunter instruments

Chemicals/Poisons

- Purchase non-toxic or safer cleaning products and pesticides
- Store highly toxic or caustic chemicals in a locked/secure location
- Remove or safely store gas canisters
- Check carbon monoxide detectors

Lethal Means Safety

(Continued)

Remove lethal means from the home completely when someone is in crisis. You can ask a trusted loved one to store the lethal mean(s) for you, until the crisis has resolved. For medication, you can use the Detera Drug Deactivation and Disposal System. This system offers a permanent disposal solution for medications. If you have any unused or expired medications, you can use a Detera bag, put your medications in the bag, mix in water, and follow the instructions. The medicines will be destroyed and you can dispose of the entire bag in your normal trash. For more information, please visit the Detera System website.

deterasystem.com

Ensuring that firearms are stored securely and handled appropriately is essential to preventing suicides. Suicides make up the majority of all gun-related deaths in the US. ^[11] Suicide attempts using firearms are also highly lethal, with 90% of firearm suicide attempts ending in death. ^[12] Research shows that there is a low rate of means substitutions among people who are suicidal, meaning that if the preferred means is removed, a person in crisis is less likely to attempt. ^[13] Since firearms are so lethal, it is critical that access to firearms is restricted for a person who is thinking about suicide.



Voluntary Safe Storage

One of the most important things that responsible firearm owners can do is to limit access. One unsecured firearm can put everyone in a household at risk of killing or injuring themselves or others, not just the firearm owner. Whatever securing devices are chosen, make sure to keep keys and combinations away from children, unauthorized users, and people at risk of harming themselves or others. Store firearms unloaded, locked, and separate from ammunition. In cases of crisis, consider storing firearms temporarily at an external voluntary safe storage option near you.

— **For Safe Storage Near You**

Visit the Maryland Safe Storage Map website.

mdpgv.org/safestoragemap

Lethal Means Safety

(Continued)

Extreme Risk Protective Order

An extreme risk protective order (ERPO) is a civil court-issued order that temporarily prohibits individuals who are found to be a danger to themselves or others from purchasing or possessing a firearm, rifle, or shotgun. Some counties in Maryland now have ERPO Liason who can assist with this process, provide training, and answer any questions you may have. Check with your local health department for more information.

In Maryland, ERPOs can be filed by:

- **Family members**
- **Law enforcement**
- **Health care professionals including...**
 - Physician
 - Psychologist
 - Clinical Social Worker (LCSW)
 - Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor (LCPC)
 - Clinical Nurse (specializing in psychiatric/mental health nursing)
 - Psychiatric Nurse Practitioner
 - Licensed Clinical Marriage or Family Therapist (LMFT)
 - Health Officer
 - Designee of a Health Officer who has examined the individual

— For more about ERPOs

Bloomberg American Health Initiative ERPO Website.
americanhealth.jhu.edu/implementERPO

Extreme Risk Protection Order (ERPO) Informational Toolkit
bit.ly/BHAERPO



Train

Access evidence-based trainings that build confidence in recognizing warning signs, starting supportive conversations, getting people connected to live-saving resources and safe spaces.

Types of Training

Learning how to respond to someone in crisis can save a life. Maryland offers a range of free and low-cost training opportunities for individuals, providers, educators, faith leaders, and community members. These trainings are part of our commitment to Integrated Wellness and Prevention, equipping people with the tools they want/need to support safety, healing, and connection. No matter your background, there's a training for you. To stay up-to-date with training, please subscribe to our newsletter and visit our [linktr.ee link at \[linktr.ee/mdhsuicideprevention\]\(https://linktr.ee/mdhsuicideprevention\)](https://linktr.ee/mdhsuicideprevention). Below are various training options that are available in addition to the trainings our department hosts.

Mental Health First Aid (MHFA)

A national skills-based course that teaches participants how to recognize, understand, and respond to signs of mental health or substance use challenges.

Available versions include:

- Adult MHFA (for general audiences)
- Youth MHFA (focused on helping youth)
- Teen MHFA (teaches high schoolers how to help peers)
- MHFA for Veterans, Older Adults, First Responders, and more

mhamd.org

Question, Persuade, Refer (QPR)

QPR is a nationally recognized, evidence-based program that teaches anyone how to recognize warning signs of suicide, ask the right questions, and refer someone to help.

Right now, Maryland offers versions tailored to:

- Athletics - bit.ly/QPRAthletics
- Mental Health Professionals bit.ly/4iaU6Ye
- Older Adults - bit.ly/QPRAging

qprinstitute.com

Counseling on Access to Lethal Means (CALM)

CALM equips providers and community members to talk with individuals about making their environments safer, especially when someone is in crisis. It teaches how to reduce access to firearms, medications, or other lethal means until the risk has passed.

zerosuicide.edc.org/resources/training-tools/calm-counseling-access-lethal-means

Types of Training

(Continued)

safeTALK

A half-day alertness training that teaches participants ages 15+ how to identify people with thoughts of suicide and connect them to life-saving support. It's practical, interactive, and action-focused.

livingworks.net/safetalk

Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training

This two-day intensive workshop is designed for participants ages 16+ to learn how to recognize when someone may be at risk for suicide and how to create a plan to support their safety and connection to care. ASIST is widely used by schools, crisis centers, law enforcement, and healthcare systems.

livingworks.net/asist

Trevor Project Trainings

Maryland partners with [The Trevor Project](https://www.thetrevorproject.org/) to offer suicide prevention trainings tailored for LGBTQIA+ youth support.

- CARE Training (Connect, Adapt, Respond, Empower): Covers data and risk factors affecting LGBTQ youth and teaches how to respond with cultural humility and empathy.
- Ally Training: Helps adults learn how to affirm and support LGBTQ youth in schools, homes, and communities.

[Training Request Form](#)

Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) International Coordinator Training

CIT training equips law enforcement officers, emergency responders, and behavioral health professionals to respond effectively and compassionately to individuals experiencing mental health crises.

citinternational.org

Veterans Affairs S.A.V.E. Training

Developed in partnership with the PsychArmor Institute, this free online training teaches anyone how to act with care and compassion if they encounter a veteran who is in crisis or having thoughts of suicide.

S.A.V.E. stands for Signs, Ask, Validate, Encourage and Expedite.

mirecc.va.gov/suicideprevention/Education/education_index.asp



Connect

Discover organizations, community programs, and partnerships that foster connection, reduce isolation, and create safe, healing spaces.

Connecting to Hope



Suicide is a deeply personal tragedy for many Marylanders. Families, friends, and entire communities are shaped by the lives we lose each year. Yet, alongside grief lies a profound truth: for those struggling today, there is a real opportunity to reconnect with hope. Through caring, informed communities, suicide can be prevented.

Suicide prevention isn't just something we do for others, it's something we build together, through everyday actions, relationships, reflection, and taking care of self. Whether you're supporting yourself, a loved one, or your whole community, your care makes a difference.

Research confirms the strength of this approach. Comprehensive community-based interventions, rooted in cultural and social realities, are shown to build protective factors while reducing suicides across the lifespan. ^[24] Likewise, integrated healthcare systems using proactive models like Zero Suicide demonstrate real results. One health system saw a 25% drop in suicide attempts after implementing coordinated screening, safety planning, and follow-up care. ^[25]

Suicide prevention is public health, rooted in integrated wellness and prevention. It means tending to mental, physical, and social health as one whole, creating safe environments where hope can take root even when things are hard. So ask yourself, when you are your most tired, what are you willing to do? Will you still dance when a good song comes on? Will you still knit, or read? Those small acts of connecting to hope and care are how we keep the light alive, for ourselves and each other.

Connecting to Hope

(Continued)

Connect to Yourself

- Pause and check in with your feelings.
- Make space for your own healing. Grief, stress, anxiety, and pain deserve care.
- Practice small acts of self-compassion: rest, breathe, journal, talk to someone you trust.
- Remember, taking care of yourself is not selfish. It is essential prevention.

Self-awareness is a protective factor. When you know what support you want/need, it becomes easier to ask for it.

Connect to Friends and Family

- Reach out and ask, “How are you really doing?”
- Share facts about suicide prevention and mental health. Help others unlearn myths and stigma.
- Save 988 in your phone and talk to loved ones about it.
- Call, text, or chat 988 for 24/7 confidential support.
- [988lifeline.org](https://www.988lifeline.org)

You do not have to fix someone’s pain. Just showing up and listening can be lifesaving.

Connect to Your Community

- Attend local events like the Maryland Suicide Prevention Conference or AFSP’s Out of the Darkness Walks
- Get involved with local organizations working to support mental wellness and suicide prevention
- Share resources in your school, faith space, workplace, or neighborhood. Even a small conversation can change a life
- Advocate for safe spaces, both physical and emotional, where people can be themselves and ask for help without shame

Connection is one of the strongest protectors against suicide. When we create safe communities, we create hope. Your presence, your voice, and your willingness to connect can help someone survive. Whether it is September or any day of the year, you are part of this movement. You can connect to hope, and you can help others do the same.

Connecting to Hope

(Continued)

Hope doesn't always arrive on its own. Sometimes, we find it through other people, by being seen, heard, or simply held in a space without judgment. Connecting to hope often begins with connecting to someone else.

But in moments of struggle or grief, knowing who to reach out to or how to start that conversation can feel overwhelming. This page helps guide that process.

How to Find the Right People

The first step in connecting to hope is identifying trusted people who make you feel safe, supported, and respected. They don't need to have all the answers, they just need to care.

You might start with:

- A friend who listens without trying to “fix” things
- A family member who shows up, even in quiet ways
- A teacher, coach, or mentor who believes in you
- A faith leader or elder who makes space for your questions
- A peer support group or recovery community
- A therapist, school counselor, or medical provider
- A crisis line counselor who's there 24/7
 - Call, text, or chat 988 anytime

You don't need a perfect person, you need a safe one.

What Makes Someone Safe to Talk To?

A trusted person often:

- Listens without interrupting
- Respects your feelings, even when they don't understand
- Doesn't shame or blame you
- Encourages you to ask for help
- Supports your boundaries and safety
- Believes in your right to feel better

Who to Connect To?

If someone dismisses your pain or pressures you to act a certain way, they may not be the best support for this moment. Keep reaching, there are others who will understand, you just have to find your tribe of people who share similar core values.

How to Start the Conversation

Talking about hope, pain, or mental health can feel awkward, but it's a sign of courage.

Here are a few ways to begin:

- "Can I talk to you about something hard I've been feeling?"
- "Lately, I've been struggling to feel hopeful."
- "I'm not looking for solutions, I just need someone to hear me."
- "Do you have space to talk today? I just need a safe place to land."

You can also send a text, write a letter, or use art to express what's hard to say out loud. Connection doesn't have to be perfect, it just has to be real.

Create and Seek Safe Spaces

Hope grows in safe spaces, environments where people can show up as they are. You can create those spaces by:

- Listening without judgment
- Respecting lived experiences
- Asking, "What do you want/need right now?"
- Making room for silence, tears, or uncertainty
- Being consistent, trust takes time

Safe spaces aren't always physical. They can be moments, messages, or mindsets. Every time you make someone feel accepted and supported, you help grow hope. Check out our "Safe Space Checklist" in the "Sustain" section.

Hope is not something you have to carry alone. It's something we build together, in conversation, in community, in care. Whether you're reaching out or being someone's lifeline, you're part of a network that says: "You matter. You are not alone. We're in this together." If you can't find a person to connect to, a companion animal may help.

Events that Connect Us

Events that connect us remind us we're not alone. Whether we're raising awareness, sharing stories, or learning together, these moments help grow hope and strengthen community. To find events, walks, etc. follow us on linktr.ee/mdhsuicideprevention.



National Suicide Prevention Week
Sun, Sep 7, 2025 – Sat, Sep 13, 2025

National Suicide Prevention Week is a time to raise awareness, share resources, and spread hope. Learn the warning signs, start a conversation, and help others feel seen. Use #ConnectingtoHope to be part of the movement.



World Suicide Prevention Day
September 10, 2025

World Suicide Prevention Day honors those affected by suicide, raises awareness, and focuses on connecting people to care. Since 2003, communities worldwide have joined in this effort. Wear yellow to show your support and help spread hope.



Annual Suicide Prevention Conference
October 8, 2025

This statewide event brings together professionals, advocates, and community members to explore how safe spaces can reduce suicide risk. Learn how to support healing across schools, workplaces, clinics, and communities through connection, equity, and care.

A Coalition of Partners

Across Maryland, we work alongside dedicated partners who bring lived experience, expertise, and care to their communities. The organizations below are just a few of the many we collaborate with to raise awareness, provide training, support healing, and help save lives.

Together We Care

A set of community-driven campaigns supported by our office. These campaigns spotlight and elevate suicide prevention and mental health promotion for historically underserved and excluded groups. Each campaign is undertaken in partnership with grassroots organizations that serve these communities.



Taking Care of Us

Taking Care of Us is Maryland's Black and Brown mental health and suicide prevention initiative. Led in partnership with Black Mental Health Alliance and the Office of Minority Health and Health Disparities, and Africans for Mental Health, this campaign centers Black voices, builds trust, and fosters culturally rooted healing.

bit.ly/TakingCareofUs



Key Partners

Black Mental Health Alliance develops, promotes, and sponsors culturally-relevant educational forums, trainings, and referral services that support the health and well-being of Black people and their communities.

blackmentalhealth.com



Office of Minority Health and Health Disparities works to advance health equity and eliminate disparities in Maryland by addressing social determinants of health, guiding policy, and offering statewide consultation and support.

health.maryland.gov/mhhd

A Coalition of Partners

(Continued)

Taking Care of Us

Key Partners Continued

Africans for Mental Health supports African immigrants and diasporic communities by connecting them to culturally responsive care, faith-centered healing, mental wellness education, and stigma reduction through trusted, community-led outreach.

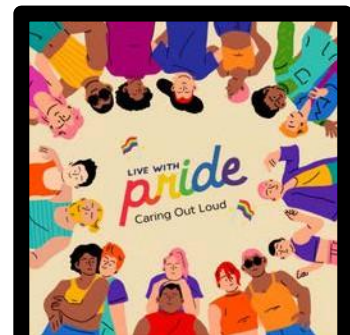
africansformentalhealth.org



Caring Out Loud

Supporting LGBTQ+ Youth with the Trevor Project

In partnership with The Trevor Project, our office launched a first-in-the-nation Train-the-Trainer program in Maryland. Through Ally and CARE Trainings, we're building safe, informed spaces for LGBTQ+ youth across the state.



Key Partners

The Trevor Project works to end suicide among LGBTQ young people through provision of crisis services, training, research, and advocacy. The Trevor Project offers a toll-free telephone line where confidential assistance and crisis support is provided by trained counselors.

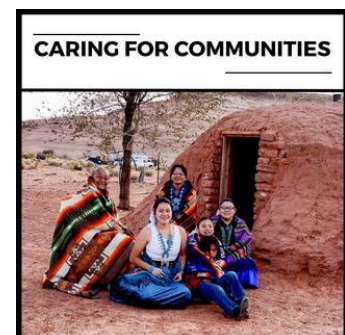
thetrevorproject.org



Caring for Communities

Supporting Native and Indigenous Communities

In partnership with Native American Lifelines, this initiative provides culturally grounded mental health training, advocacy, and support for Native and Indigenous communities in Maryland. It emphasizes equity, wellness, and honoring Native identities in healing.



A Coalition of Partners

(Continued)

Caring for Communities Continued

Key Partners

Native American Lifelines promotes health and social resiliency within Urban American Indian communities. Native American LifeLines applies principles of person-centered care to provide culturally centered behavioral health, dental, outreach and referral services.

nativeamericanlifelines.org



Caring for Champions

This initiative strengthens suicide prevention and mental wellness in Maryland's athletic community. In partnership with Alston for Athletes, we support coaches, directors, and student-athletes with tools, training, and access to care that promotes mental health on and off the field.



Key Partners

Alston for Athletes provides mental health resources and training to athletic directors, coaches, and student-athletes across the country. This work will expand to include coaches, sports medicine professionals, and other high-contact athletic support personnel. AFA's mission is to advocate for student-athlete mental health awareness through policy change and providing access to mental health services.

alstonforathletes.org



Caring for the Village

This initiative strengthens suicide prevention for older adults through training, system change, and community voice. Led with partners across aging and behavioral health, it honors the role of elders and ensures mental wellness remains part of Maryland's continuum of care.



A Coalition of Partners

(Continued)

Caring for the Village Continued

Key Partners

Maryland Department of Aging supports efforts to improve mental wellness and prevent suicide among older adults. This partnership helps connect aging services to behavioral health supports, building a stronger, more responsive system of care.

aging.maryland.gov



Governor's Commission on Suicide Prevention

The Governor's Commission was created in 2009 to strengthen and coordinate the state's suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention services. Governor's Commission meetings are open to the public, and are available to stream on the Office of Suicide Prevention's Facebook page (@mdhsuicideprev). For more information about the commission, visit

health.maryland.gov/bha/suicideprevention/Pages/governor's-commission-on-suicide-prevention.aspx



Maryland's Suicide Prevention Coalitions

Suicide prevention is a community effort. Across Maryland, we support suicide prevention coalitions in all 23 counties and Baltimore City. These coalitions bring together local health departments, behavioral health authorities, schools, youth-serving organizations, crisis response teams, faith-based groups, and more.

We provide these coalitions with training, technical assistance, toolkits, outreach materials, gun locks, medication lock bags, and 988 promotional items for community events.

Through these local partnerships, we ensure every region of Maryland has the tools, training, and support to help prevent suicide and build safer, more connected communities.

Suicide Prevention Non-Profits

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP)

Maryland Chapter

AFSP Maryland unites individuals from all walks of life to prevent suicide. Through community walks, education, research funding, and survivor support, AFSP empowers Marylanders to raise awareness, reduce stigma, and promote healing. They also foster community through events, trainings, and volunteer opportunities that honor those lost and uplift those who are struggling.

afsp.org/chapter/maryland

Mental Health Association of Maryland (MHAMD)

MHAMD promotes mental health across the lifespan through advocacy, training, peer support, and public awareness campaigns. They serve youth, adults, and older Marylanders with culturally responsive and trauma-informed programs. MHAMD also leads coalitions to advance behavioral health legislation and eliminate stigma, while building community-centered tools and resources.

mhamd.org

National Alliance on Mental Illness Maryland (NAMI-MD)

NAMI Maryland empowers people affected by mental illness through free education, support groups, and statewide advocacy. Local affiliates offer family and peer programs, public awareness events, and policy engagement to improve mental health systems. They focus on lived experience, grassroots leadership, and building hope through community-based partnerships across Maryland.

namimd.org/about_nami_maryland



Sustain

Build lasting strategies for wellness, resilience, and community care that protect hope, prevent suicide, and support long-term healing.

Hope and Grief Walk Together

Hope after loss does not mean "moving on" or forgetting. It means discovering new ways of living with the pain while honoring the memory of what was lost. Research shows that adaptive coping strategies, including meaning-making, connection with others, and continued bonds with loved ones, can significantly reduce the risk of prolonged grief and suicide risk after bereavement. ^[56] For some, this may include spiritual reflection, therapy, community rituals, or advocacy.

Suicide loss survivors often face unique barriers such as stigma, shame, or isolation, which may complicate grief. Trauma-informed support groups and survivor-specific resources can help restore a sense of safety and connection. ^[57] The Compassionate Friends, Alliance of Hope, and AFSP's Healing Conversations are examples of peer-based supports that normalize grief while guiding people gently toward hope.

Professionals note that integrated care, including peer support, therapy, and self-regulation tools like grounding, journaling, or creating memory spaces, can nurture both healing and connection. ^[58] These grief-informed practices mirror the pillars of integrated wellness and prevention by supporting the whole person and acknowledging the profound impact of loss.

Children grieve differently than adults. They may express grief through behavior, play, or changes in mood, and often need repeated reassurance and clear, age-appropriate explanations. Children may say things like "Is it my fault they died?", "When are they coming back?", or "Are you going to die too?", reflecting confusion, fear, and a longing for reassurance.

Ultimately, hope does not require resolution. It only asks us to keep showing up. In grief, hope can look like getting out of bed, attending a memorial, planting something in someone's memory, or saying their name out loud. Every small act of remembering, reaching out, or choosing to breathe through pain is a thread of hope.

Grief Support Resources

- grief.org
- Alliance of Hope for Suicide Loss Survivors - allianceofhope.org
- AFSP Healing Conversations - afsp.org/healing-conversations
- Compassionate Friends - compassionatefriends.org
- Grief Camp for Youth - comfortzonecamp.org

The Value of Practical Self-Care

Self-care is not a self-indulgence, it's a lifeline. Especially in suicide prevention work, it's vital to protect your own emotional and mental well-being so you can continue helping others with compassion and clarity.

Why Self-Care Matters

Consistent self-care protects your health by reducing emotional exhaustion, building emotional resilience, and helping you stay grounded when facing grief or tragedy.^[39]

Build a Self-Care Map That Works for You

Self-care looks different for everyone. It's not about spa days unless spa days work for you. A helpful tool is creating a Self-Care Map, a practical guide that reflects your life and wants/needs:

- What calms you right now?
- Morning tea in silence, a walk around the block, listening to your favorite song, journaling for ten minutes, think small, doable actions.
- Who can you reach out to?
- Identify one person you can call when you need to be heard without judgment and one person you can ask for practical help.
- What tools or resources help?
- Maybe it's an app like those reviewed on One Mind PsyberGuide, where experts rate digital tools for sleep, mood, or stress support.
- What's your crisis backup?
- Strengthen your map with 988 and local resources you can call day or night, not just for others, but for yourself.

Make It Real

A self-care map should fit your life, not the other way around. Keep it somewhere visible, like your phone, fridge, or desk, and check in with it daily, especially on hard days. It is okay to repeat small acts that help. When self-care feels out of reach, ask yourself: What is the easiest thing I can do right now?

— *Find a Wellness App for You!*

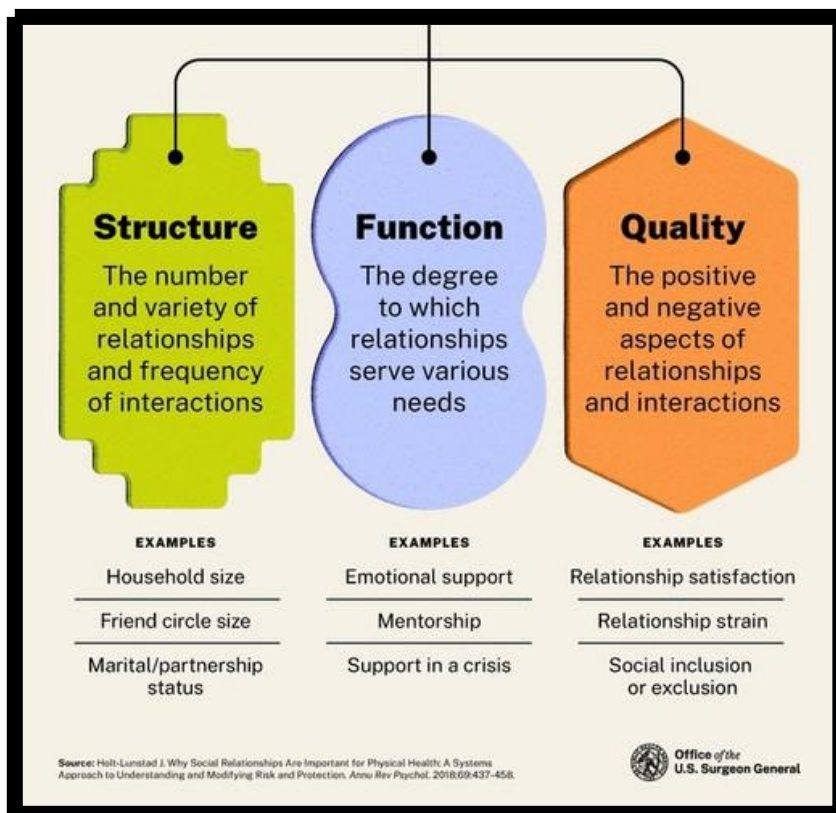
Visit the One Mind PsyberGuide website.

onemindpsyberguide.org

Social Connection

Our relationships with loved ones and our communities are vital to our well-being. As social isolation rises due to illness, aging, etc., making connection a priority is more important than ever. Social connection delivers concrete benefits for mental, emotional, and physical health.

In May 2023, U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy issued an advisory titled Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation. It outlines that loneliness and lack of connection increase risks for major conditions such as heart disease, stroke, dementia, depression, and premature death, and cost billions in healthcare spending. ^[19]



— Explore the Advisory —

Visit the US Surgeon General’s Social Connection Priority Area Website.
hhs.gov/surgeongeneral/priorities/connection/index.html

Routine, Sleep, and Wellness

Establishing consistent routines and healthy sleep habits supports emotional regulation, strengthens coping skills, and aligns with suicide prevention efforts.

Evidence from Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Insomnia (CBT-I) shows it can improve sleep long-term and reduce depressive symptoms without medication.^[48] Veteran studies reveal CBT-I also cuts suicidal thoughts by 33 percent.^[49] Meanwhile, Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) bolsters mental wellness through teaching skills in mindfulness, emotion regulation, interpersonal effectiveness, and distress tolerance, key components in rising above crises.^[50]



Mindfulness – paying attention to the present moment, on purpose, and without judgment. It’s about noticing what’s happening inside you (thoughts, feelings, body sensations) and around you (what you see, hear, smell, touch) right now. Instead of getting stuck in the past or worrying about the future, you focus on this moment, which can help you respond calmly and clearly.

Emotional Regulation - noticing your feelings and choosing how to respond in a healthy way. It’s about understanding your emotions, like sadness, anger, or stress, so they don’t take over. Instead of reacting right away, you pause, take a breath, and decide what to do next.

Interpersonal Effectiveness - knowing how to ask for what you want/need, set healthy boundaries, and keep good relationships with others, without giving up your self-respect.

Distress Tolerance - getting through tough moments without making things worse. It helps you stay safe and grounded when emotions feel big, painful, or hard to control.

Routine, Sleep, and Wellness

(Continued)



Routine

- Practical Steps - Set consistent wake time and bedtime; link small self-care habits to daily cues.
- Why It Matters - Builds stability, ground and predictability for the mind and body.

Sleep

- Practical Steps - Use CBT-I ideas: wind down before bed, limit bedroom to resting, avoid screen time and caffeine later in the day.
- Why It Matters - Better rest supports mood, focus, and resilience.

Mindfulness

- Practical Steps - Spend 5 minutes a day noticing breath or surroundings.
- Why It Matters - Slows racing thoughts and reconnects you to the present.

Emotion Regulation

- Practical Steps - Pause to name your feeling and ask: “What do I need now?”
- Why It Matters - Strengthens your inner wisdom and choices over reactivity.

Distress Tolerance

- Practical Steps - Create a small “pause kit”, music, textures, writing prompts, or a walk. Use it when overwhelmed.
- Why It Matters - Helps you stay grounded while managing intense feelings.

Interpersonal Awareness

- Practical Steps - Check in with friends or make one small social plan each week.
- Why It Matters - Connection helps you and others feel seen, reducing isolation. ^[49-55]

Hobbies: Connecting to Hope and Yourself

Engaging in hobbies can reduce stress, support emotional resilience, and foster social connection, all of which contribute to integrated wellness and help reduce suicide risk.

A large study involving older adults in the U.S. and other countries showed that people with hobbies reported better health, greater happiness, fewer depressive symptoms, and higher life satisfaction, suggesting a strong link between hobbies and mental wellness. ^[43] Another study confirmed that hobbies can help reduce stress by lowering cortisol levels, enhance mood and self-esteem, and create meaningful connections. ^[44]



Hobbies to Explore

Mindful Movement

Walking, gardening, dancing, yoga are activities shown to reduce anxiety and improve mood. ^[46]

Creative Expression

Drawing, writing, knitting/crocheting, painting, and crafting. Creativity fosters purpose, stress relief, and even mental health stability. ^[21-23]

Cognitive Play

Puzzles, reading, chess, and learning a language all help engaging your mind and helps to reduce cognitive decline. ^[47]

Community Connection

Volunteer, book clubs, group classes, suicide loss survivor support groups, walking clubs, language clubs, etc. Shared interests help us feel supported and seen.

Nature-Based Habits

Gardening, birdwatching, fishing, swimming, kayaking, walking, etc. Time outdoors supports mental clarity and belonging. ^[48]

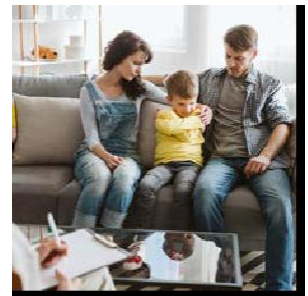
Navigating the Behavioral Health System

Navigating the behavioral health system can be complicated. If you or a loved one needs or wants care, particularly for a suicide-related concern, there are a few key points to consider.

Where Do I Start?

There are many behavioral health provider options that suit different needs. It may take time to find the best provider for your child. Professionals who can help include:

- Medical Doctors, including Pediatricians and Psychiatrists (MD)
- Nurse Practitioner (NP)
- Psychologist (Ph.D. and Psy.D)
- Social Worker (LCSW)
- Counselor (LCPC)
- Marriage and Family Therapist (MFT)
- Crisis Support Specialist
- Peer Specialist



How Do I Find Help?

Your health insurance company will be able to guide you towards a provider that is in your network. In-network providers are typically less expensive than out-of-network providers. If you do not have insurance, you can sign up for Medicaid or low-cost insurance. Your Local Behavioral Health Authority, Core Service Agency, or Local Addiction Authority can also help you find a local provider.

Therapy to Consider

Some therapy modalities have been shown to reduce suicidal thoughts and suicidal behavior. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT) are two of the top evidence-based therapy modalities that help with suicidal thoughts and suicidal behaviors.

Types of Behavioral Health Treatment

There are many types of treatment options that fulfill different behavioral health needs. Here are some options to consider.

- **Individual Therapy:** One-on-one therapy between the therapist and the individual seeking help.
- **Family Therapy:** Family members work together under the supervision of a therapist with the main purpose of improving familial relationships.
- **Group Therapy:** A group of people meet to describe and discuss their problems together under the supervision of a therapist.
- **Medication Therapy:** One-on-one consultations with a psychiatrist to discuss how medication can assist, typically in combination with psychotherapy.
- **Targeted Case Management (TCM) Provider:** Supports clients with mental health needs through connections to community partners to achieve life goals. A TCM Case Worker can offer parenting support, school support, and a connection to transportation.
- **Assertive Community Treatment (ACT):** ACT teams serve individuals who have been diagnosed with serious and persistent forms of behavioral health challenges. The team is usually comprised of a clinician and a peer. Promotes independence, rehabilitation, community integration, and recovery.
- **Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services:** Individualized psychiatric rehabilitation services often include attending a day program, as well as a wide range of programs designed to promote independent living skills.
- **Residential Rehabilitation Services (16 years and older):** An adolescent moves into a community that has staff on-site anywhere between 40 hours a week to 24/7. Staff assist with administering medications, and teaching daily living and coping skills.
- **Intensive Outpatient Program:** Structured non-residential psychological treatment program that addresses concerns that do not require detoxification through a combination of group and individual psychotherapy, family counseling, groups, and strategies for encouraging engagement in treatment.
 - **Residential Treatment Center:** Provides intensive help for youth with serious behavioral health challenges. Children temporarily live outside of their homes and in a facility where they can be supervised by trained staff 24/7.
- **Behavioral Health Walk-In & Urgent Care Centers:** Non-crisis patients typically receive a mental health evaluation by a Mental Health Clinician or Psychiatric Nurse Practitioner. Patients in crisis will be typically be referred to the emergency department.
- **Hospitals/Emergency Departments:** Emergency stabilization during crisis. It is important to note that wait times and costs can be a limiting factor with this option. Your local hospital may have a crisis counselor or a walk-in crisis wing. Consider looking into these services if you have a child at risk of a crisis.

Additional Services That May Help

Every county in Maryland has different programs available. Your Local Behavioral Health Authority, Core Service Agency, Local Addiction Authority, doctor, or therapist can guide you to the programs that are available in your county.

Maryland Coalition of Families (MCF) is the first and only statewide nonprofit organization that offers family peer support to people and families who have a loved one experiencing mental health, substance use, or problem gambling challenges. Using their personal experience caring for their own loved one, our Family Peer Support Specialists offer emotional support, resource connection, and systems navigation at no cost. mdcoalition.org

The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) is a voluntary health organization that advocates for research and education about suicide. The organization's stated mission is to "save lives and bring hope to those affected by suicide". afsp.org

The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) is the nation's largest grassroots mental health organization dedicated to building better lives for the millions of Americans affected by mental illness. The NAMI organization operates at the national, state, and local level. namimd.org

988 Suicide and Crisis Line provides 24/7, 365 assistance for behavioral health concerns. 988 Suicide and Crisis Line can connect you to local mental health resources near you. You can call, text, or chat 988. 988 also offers multiple language options for accessibility. 988lifeline.org

The Maryland Department of Social Services offers many family-oriented programs.

- **Family Preservation Services:** Enhances the parent's ability to create a stable and nurturing home environment. They also provide, refer to, and coordinate services needed to achieve or maintain family safety, stability, independence, and unity.
- **Integrative Therapeutic Family Services:** ITFS provides support services to youth who experience symptoms or behaviors that threaten to disrupt their current placement. ITFS staff work with the families in their homes. Grant-funded services are provided at no cost to the families.

MENTOR Maryland (MM): MM serves children and adolescents who are facing a range of challenges and their families. MM offers services and supports that lead to growth and independence, regardless of the physical, intellectual or behavioral challenges that individuals face. md-mentor.com

Parent CRAFT is an online video course that teaches parents the skills they need to meet the risks of substance misuse. This course is free for residents of Maryland who want help getting their child to accept substance use treatment. cadenceonline.com/maryland

Behavioral Health Treatment-FAQ

Q How long is a therapy session?

The session length varies depending on what you want, what the behavioral health professional offers, and what costs the insurance will cover. They typically range anywhere from 40 minutes to an hour.

Q How often will I go to a therapist?

The frequency varies on what you want, what the behavioral health professional suggests for your specific needs, and what costs the insurance company will cover.

Q How much does therapy cost?

Cost varies widely depending on the provider, your income, and what costs your insurance company will cover. If you only have to pay a co-pay, therapy could be as little as \$20/session. It can be as much as \$240 a session for psychiatry visits. Some professionals offer a sliding scale cost based on income level. It is important to ask for the cost upfront.

Q How do I set up my first appointment?

Follow these steps:

- Call your mental health provider. Ask them how to prepare for your first appointment. Each provider has their own process.
- Collect any documentation the mental health provider requested. This may be identification, insurance card, past medical history, new client forms, medication and supplement list, etc.
- Consult your insurance company for cost and coverage information
- If you are doing a telehealth appointment, make sure you have the proper program downloaded. It may be useful to test the program with a friend or family member beforehand.
- Before your appointment, it may be helpful to write down notes about your signs and symptoms, and list of questions you may have
- Put it on your calendar! You may want to arrive early to complete paperwork.

First Mental Health Appointment

What to Expect

Preparing for and attending your first mental health appointment can be stressful. The following is a list of what to expect at a typical mental health appointment.

- Bring a pen and paper, and any documentation that your provider requires.
- Check in at the front desk. Let them know why you are there and what your name is.
- Fill out any paperwork they may hand you.
- Sit down and wait until your name is called.
- Your first session is typically an intake session. The provider will ask questions about your history to identify the best treatment for you.
- Once you have completed the intake questions, and therapy has started, it is important to be open, non-judgmental, and take care of yourself. Therapy can heighten emotions and it is natural to feel overwhelmed, or even exhausted. Try to remain open and take it one step at a time. It may take several sessions to feel comfortable. Ask for what you want/need.
- Ask for assignments, workbooks, and books that you can work through.
- Therapy works best if you are honest about what is and is not helping. After a few sessions, evaluate if this provider is right for you. If needed, you can find a new provider who may connect with you better.
- There is hope and recovery is possible! There is no exact timeline on improving your mental health. Try to trust the process and ask for additional support if you want/need it.



The 9-8-8 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

Marylanders can connect to a local behavioral health crisis call specialist through the 9-8-8 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. People experiencing mental health or substance use crises can call or text 9-8-8, or chat online: [988Lifeline.org](https://988lifeline.org).

What does this mean for Marylanders?

When someone in Maryland calls 9-8-8, the call is geo-routed to the nearest call center based on the caller's physical location. These centers provide phone-based support and information regarding local resources.

Who can call 9-8-8?

Anyone who wants assistance with behavioral health-related problems.

What can people expect when they call 9-8-8?

Callers will hear a greeting message while their call is routed to a Lifeline network crisis call center. Wait times may vary. Once you are connected,

- A trained crisis counselor will answer the phone, listen to the caller, understand how their problem is affecting them, provide support, and provide resources and interventions as needed.
- If a Maryland crisis center is unable to take the call, the caller will be automatically routed to a national backup crisis center.
- For more information about what to expect, visit 988lifeline.org/get-help/what-to-expect.

What can someone expect during a text?

When you text 988, you'll receive options to connect with a counselor in English, Spanish (text AYUDA), or for veterans (text 838255). After agreeing to the Terms of Service by texting "Next," you'll complete a brief survey to help the counselor understand your needs. While you wait, you may receive optional questions. A counselor will greet you, check on your safety, and offer calm, supportive conversation and resources. Wait times may vary.



The 9-8-8 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

(Continued)

What can someone expect during a chat?

When you start a chat with 988, a short survey will appear to help counselors understand your needs. By clicking “Start a Chat,” you accept the Terms of Service. You’ll then be connected to a live counselor, who will greet you, check on your safety, and offer calm, supportive conversation and resources. Wait times may vary.

Population-specific Services

Language Options: Press 2 for Spanish and request other languages in real time. The Lifeline provides text/chat assistance in Spanish as well. For 988 assistance in Spanish, text AYUDA to 988. 988 also uses Language Line Solutions to provide translation services in over 150 additional languages.

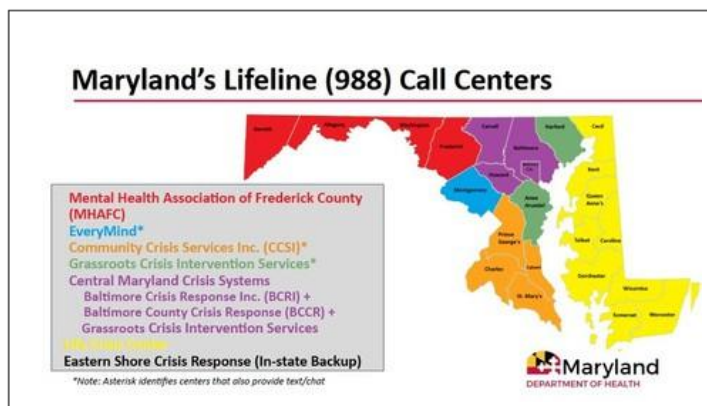
Veterans: Veterans can access the Veterans Crisis Line by calling 9-8-8 and pressing 1.

Deaf/deaf/Hard of Hearing: 9-8-8 offers videophone services. You can reach out using your TTY machine, or use the chat or text function as well. To learn more about 988 and videophone, and to apply to get your own videophone, please visit 988lifeline.org/deaf-hard-of-hearing-hearing-loss.

9-1-1 vs. 9-8-8

Understand the difference between calling 911 and 988. This SAMHSA guide explains when to use each number, helping communities respond safely and appropriately during a crisis.

library.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/988-vs-911-practical-guide-pep24-06-009.pdf



For more information, please visit 988.maryland.gov



Digital Materials

Access fact sheets, outreach tools, media materials, and templates designed to strengthen suicide prevention and integrated wellness efforts.

Digital Media Assets

Hope is something we build together, and even small visual reminders can make a big impact. Use our virtual meeting background, web banner, sticker/participation badge to help spread the message of connection and prevention. These tools can be added to email signatures, websites, virtual events, office doors, community boards, or even social media profiles. Every time you share these visuals, you help create safe spaces and open the door to healing conversations. You can download these resources in .zip form [here](#), from our [home page](#), [Dropbox](#), or linktr.ee/mdhsuicideprevention.

Virtual Meeting Background

Suicide Prevention Month



Suicide Prevention Month & Recovery Month



Digital Media Assets

(Continued)

Participation Badge



Banner



Digital Media Assets

Social Media

Shareable social media, along with recommended captions, are below. Use the graphics and messages to encourage your community to Connect to Hope!



Connecting to hope is a process that requires consistent effort and support. Focusing on hope emphasizes the opportunities for growth and recovery. Suicide is preventable. Through building awareness and essential skills, anyone can support people at risk.
bit.ly/ConnectingtoHope

Call, text, or chat 988 for help if you or a loved one are experiencing suicidal thoughts.

#ConnectingToHope
#suicidepreventionawarenessmonth



September is National Suicide Prevention Month. It's a time to raise awareness, share hope, and remind one another that help is available.
bit.ly/ConnectingtoHope

Call, text, or chat 988 for help if you or a loved one are experiencing suicidal thoughts.

#MDyoungminds
#ConnectingtoHope
#WearYellow

Digital Media Assets

Social Media Continued



Established in 2003, World Suicide Prevention Day was created by the International Association for Suicide Prevention and the World Health Organization (WHO) to share the message that suicide is preventable. Learn More about the history of World Suicide Prevention Day at iasp.info/WSPD/about

#SuicidePreventionDay
#ConnectingtoHope
#WearYellow



MDYoungMinds offers free, inspiring text messages sent straight to your phone to support your mental health. You're not alone. Hope is just a text away.

Sign up at:
health.maryland.gov/mdyoungminds

#MDyoungminds
#ConnectingtoHope
#WearYellow

Digital Media Assets

Social Media Continued



If you are struggling, you are not alone. 988 is for everyone.

Text, call, or chat 988 at anytime to speak to a trained mental health professional, have a supportive conversation, and connect to resources. 988lifeline.org

#ConnectingtoHope
#Connect2Help
#988



988 is the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, offering 24/7 support for mental health, substance use, and suicide crises. 988 Day raises awareness so more people know where to turn for help, hope, and healing. samhsa.gov/mental-health/988/newsroom/988-day

#MDyoungminds
#ConnectingtoHope
#WearYellow #988day

Digital Media Assets

Social Media Continued

PRACTICAL SUPPORT	VS	EMOTIONAL SUPPORT
Tangible, hands-on help.		Listening, caring, empathy.
DRIVING TO APPOINTMENTS	🎯	SAYING "I'M HERE FOR YOU"
BRINGING MEALS.	🍷	HOLDING SPACE WITHOUT JUDGMENT.
HELPING WITH CHILDCARE.	👶	COMFORTING SOMEONE WHO'S OVERWHELMED.
PAYING A BILL OR FILLING OUT FORMS.	✅	ENCOURAGING HOPE AND HEALING.
CONNECTING THEM TO SERVICES.	👥	BEING PRESENT THROUGH IT ALL.
DOING SOMETHING TO LIGHTEN THE LOAD.	📋	BEING SOMEONE WHO ACCEPTS THEM.

Both types of support matter. Together, they create real safety, connection, and healing.

Support comes in many forms. Practical and emotional help both matter. Whether it's driving to appointments or just saying "I'm here," you can help someone feel seen and supported. Together, we create safety and connection.

#ConnectingtoHope
#Connect2Help
#practicalselfcare
#integratedwellness



Cats don't get sad about the past or worry about the future. They stretch, nap, and enjoy the little things in the present moment. Today, take a breath, be present, and just be the cat.

#ConnectingtoHope
#bethecat
#suicidepreventionawareness

Digital Media Assets

Social Media Continued



Gambling addiction doesn't just impact finances; it can take lives. Many people facing gambling problems struggle in silence. Integrated wellness and prevention means addressing hidden struggles too. If you or someone you love is at risk, visit: helpmygamblingproblem.org/Facts or call 800-GAMBLER (800-426-2537)

#ConnectingtoHope
#gamblinghelp
#mdproblemgambling
#integratedwellness



Safely dispose of unused medications at a collection site near you. It's a small step that supports integrated wellness and prevention. Help keep Maryland communities safe. Find drop-off sites by region: bit.ly/MDRxTakeback

#MDRxtakeback
#ConnectingtoHope
#integratedwellness

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