

SUICIDE PREVENTION IN THE HOLIDAY SEASON

Are suicide rates higher during the holiday season?



The belief that the suicide rate is higher during the holiday season is a myth.^{1,2}

According to the CDC², the suicide rate peaks in the spring and fall. Suicide rates do not increase in December, despite articles that perpetuate this myth. However, the holiday season can still be challenging for suicide loss survivors and people living with depression, anxiety, or substance use disorders.

Challenges during the Holiday Season and Tips for Coping

For survivors of suicide, the holidays can be a reminder of their loved one. Survivors can sometimes blame themselves for their loved one's suicide. The holidays can be challenging for a number of reasons: many gatherings, family tension, isolation, limited contact with mental health providers, a lack of structure, and more down-time. Dealing with mental health issues can make these challenges more difficult or overwhelming³.

TIPS FOR COPING WITH THE HOLIDAYS

- Communicate with trusted family members and friends who understand your mental health condition and needs.
- Limit social media use if this is a concern for you
- Take medications as prescribed
- Call crisis hotlines or 911 if you are in crisis
- Sometimes holidays can intensify feelings of sadness or loneliness. Be sure to practice self-care.
- If you have a negative thought, recognize the thought, let it go, and think about positive memories or thoughts.

TIPS FOR SURVIVORS OF SUICIDE LOSS

- Remind yourself that your loved one's death was not your fault
- Remember that healing takes time
- You might feel flooded by thoughts of the person at the time of their death; however, as time passes, you will remember the person at more joyous occasions, such as their birthday

What do I say to someone who has lost a loved one to suicide?

It can be difficult to know what to say to someone who has lost someone to suicide, but **avoiding conversations with suicide loss survivors does not make it better.** A few ways to show support are:

I am so sorry for your loss.

I'm here for you.

I know this time of year may be hard for you. I'm thinking of you.

Let me know what I can do to help.

Strategies for Suicide Prevention During the Holiday Season

For Healthcare Providers and Clinicians⁴:

- Create a safety plan for the holidays.
- Create a means safety plan (i.e., limit access to medications and guns).
- Develop a list of 3-6 coping strategies or goals for your clients during the holidays (i.e., get out of bed, do one positive activity).
- Give clients an emergency contact for you or your practice and crisis hotline phone numbers for emergencies.
- Ask the clients if they would like to schedule check-ins during extended breaks from their routine care.
- Encourage clients to limit social media use if it is a concern for a client.

Additional Resources

Resources for Safety Planning

Download the My3 App to build a safety plan and create a support system. Visit: my3app.org/



National Resources

Suicide Prevention Lifeline

Call 1-800-273-8255

Crisis Textline

Text 741-741

Crisis Chat

Visit www.crisischat.org

Maryland Crisis Resources

Crisis Hotline

Call 211, press 1

Crisis Textline

Text 898-211

Crisis Chat and Resources

Visit MDCrisisConnect.org

For more information on suicide prevention in Maryland, visit:
health.maryland.gov/suicideprevention

References

¹AAPC. (2017). Suicide Rate is Lower During Holidays, But Holiday-Suicide Myth Persists. [Press Release]. Retrieved from

<https://www.annenbergpublicpolicycenter.org/suicide-rate-is-lower-during-holidays-but-holiday-suicide-myth-persists/>

²CDC (2013). Holiday Suicides: Fact or Myth? Retrieved from: <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/suicide/holiday.html>

³NAMI (2018). Coping with the Holidays When There is Mental Illness. Retrieved from: http://namimd.org/uploaded_files/863/

[Coping_with_the_Holidays_Page_Order.pdf](http://namimd.org/uploaded_files/863/Coping_with_the_Holidays_Page_Order.pdf)

⁴DePaulo, R. (December 13, 2018). Suicide Prevention During the Holiday Season. [Webinar]. See: <https://csmh.adobeconnect.com/p8xcp82kfxsl/>