

Suicide Risk Factors Heightened by Covid Health Crisis

by Kirstin Parmeter MA, QMHP
IOSS Therapist - South Lane Mental Health

Each year in September Mental Health Organizations and Suicide Prevention Organizations attempt to bring together survivors and allies to promote discussion and awareness around Suicide Prevention. However, this year is different in some very big ways. The COVID-19 health crisis has increased risk factors across society, leading some experts to wonder if numbers for suicide attempts might increase as has been seen during previous pandemics. Time will tell, but as a community, it is important for us to consider how those we care about might be impacted by increased stress, challenges, and most of all isolation from their natural supports. With this knowledge, we can reach out to those in our social circles and help support those among us who struggle with thoughts of ending their lives.

Here are just a few risk factors that have increased for many since the beginning of COVID-19:

Economic Stress- The COVID-19 health crisis saw the closure of many businesses, especially in the food service industry. Loss of income, complicated processes required to apply for benefits, and fears over future financial support have led many to experience high levels of stress in their daily lives.

Social Isolation- While some welcome increased isolation, for many connecting socially with others is essential to their mental health. As individuals and families make choices about safe contact and navigate staying connected, many are experiencing a real loss of connection with others. Isolation in the midst of a struggle to find meaning in living is perhaps the biggest threat to getting help.

Loss of Community Contact- Our communities help provide us with routine, connection, and support. Loss of contact, especially for Students and Senior citizens, can present a real threat to mental health. For students, being unable to attend school in person and interact with school staff and peers who might notice slight changes in mood, means that there is less awareness and opportunity for intervention with students who might be struggling with suicidal thoughts. For senior citizens, especially those living in retirement or nursing home communities, the inability to have family visit or to engage with other residents on a daily basis can have a profound effect on mental health and depression.

Loss of Religious or Other Community Supports- We need each other, and our communities often serve as a real support to our wellness on many levels such as mental, spiritual, relational to name a few. For many people Religious communities help provide structure and meaning to their daily struggles. The loss of this support can deeply impact a person's ability to see purpose in their life.

Barriers to Mental Health treatment- Many during this time have identified a need for mental health support, but access to counseling services can vary depending on personal circumstances. The South Lane area has several

options for low cost and free counseling. During this time, most counselors have made themselves available by phone and video chat. While counseling may look different since COVID-19, support is still available if you need to access a listening and supportive professional. Information about counseling support in our community, both through South Lane Mental Health and community partners, can always be obtained by calling our office at (541) 942-3939. Let us help get you connected.

Delayed Care for Existing Medical Conditions or Elective Surgeries- For many who live with chronic pain and medical conditions that make daily living a struggle, this time has been particularly discouraging. While medical facilities begin to schedule elective and follow-up visits with patients, for many the COVID-19 health crisis has meant months of untreated pain and increased emotional distress.

Social Media influences- Quarantine and isolation have led most people to spend increased time on social and news media. Events over the past 6 months have led many to feel distress at the state of society and our nation's future. This distress, coupled with the absence of natural supports for mental health, can increase depression and anxiety for individuals.

Knowing someone who has died by suicide- This is a big risk factor for suicide and one which can drive a person to consider suicide as an option to ending their distress more seriously than they might otherwise. Over 40% of us know someone who has died by suicide, yet we rarely talk about it. Let's work as a community to change that.

So what do we as caring individuals do to help prevent suicide in our community, especially during this time of increased isolation? We check up on our people. Just as a good neighbor would check on other neighbors after a storm, we can reach out to those in our life who we know have been negatively impacted by the above factors. Each of us knows someone whose circumstances are reflected in the risk factors listed above. Consider making a list of the persons in your life who could use a check-in, then look at the information and suggestions provided at <https://preventionlane.org/prevention-topics/suicide-prevention>.

If the above factors apply to you, and you have been struggling with suicidal thoughts, help is available through The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255), or you can text the word HELLO to the Crisis Text Line at 741741. If you are a danger to yourself or others, please call 911 or go directly to the Emergency Room at your local hospital, where trained Mental Health professionals can connect you

September 1s

National

SUICIDE

Prevention Awareness Month

with the help you need to stay safe. Additional help line information is listed at the end of this article.

Talking about suicide is uncomfortable, but by having the courage to begin conversations with those we care about, we can help reduce the risk of death by suicide. Not talking about suicide does not prevent it. By talking about it, we are not putting ideas in another person's head. Thoughts of suicide are normal, and some research suggests that 80% of people have had suicidal thoughts at some point in their lives. Among attempt survivors, it's reported that over 90% regret trying to die by suicide after the fact. By removing the stigma from conversations about suicide and depression, we can get help to individuals struggling to find a reason to remain alive. When we are honest and courageous in our conversations about suicide, we create a safe place for help and healing to occur. This September let's reach out to those close to us who struggle. In doing so, we just might save a life.

Additional Crisis Support Lines:

- YouthLine (ages 11-21) text Teen2Teen to 839863, or call 1-877-968-8491
- The Trevor Project (for LGBTQIA+) 1-866-488-7386 or text START to 678678
- Trans Lifeline (for trans and questioning callers- staffed by trans persons) 1-877-565-8860
- Veterans Crisis Line 1-800-273-8255 or text 838255, Support for hearing impaired Veterans at 1-800-799-4889
- Senior Intervention Hotline (for persons over 60) 1-800-971-0016

Kirstin Parmeter works as a Therapist with South Lane Mental Health, and is a member of the Lane County Suicide Prevention Coalition.



Thank you to these sponsors

1345 Birch Ave., P.O. Box 5, Cottage Grove, OR 97424
Phone: 541-942-3939 Fax: 541-942-9310 www.slmh.org

541-726-7689 Eugene/Springfield
541-942-9635 Cottage Grove

2775 Row River Rd. • Cottage Grove, OR 97424
tfeffer@bradschevy.com
www.bradschevy.com
(541) 942-4415
FAX (541) 942-2881

A Tradition of Service
POLICE DEPARTMENT
400 E. Main Street
Cottage Grove, OR 97424
(541) 942-9145 • FAX (541) 942-7705
www.cgpolice.org

1144 Willagillespie Rd #32, Eugene, OR 97401
(541) 342-5567

PO Box 277 Drain, OR 97435
Work 541-836-2282
fax 541-836-2292
shirleypilley@centurytel.net

“Help, Hope & Healing Since 1970”
Looking Glass Community Services
24/7 Youth Crisis Line: 541-689-3111
Cottage Grove Rural Program Office: 541-767-3823

John Trombly, Owner/President
ph: 541-767-1611
fax: 541-767-3005
john@fortrockconstruction.com
www.FortRockConstruction.com
DON'T LEAVE YOUR PROJECT TO CHANCE

Enjoy Fine Food in a Family Atmosphere
• Air Conditioned
• Large Seating
• Tourist Information
• Fireplace
• Sandwiches
• Salad Bar
OPEN DAILY 11 A.M.
To Go Orders Call... 541-942-5531
At the corner of Gateway Blvd. & Main Street.

499 West 4th Avenue, Eugene, OR 97401
ShelterCare.org
ShelterCare enriches lives through exceptional services that nurture hope, opportunity, and dignity

Little Caesars
NEXT TIME • SAVE TIME
ORDER ONLINE
SKIP THE REGISTER
littlecaesars.com
PIZZA PORTAL Pickup
(541) 942-2551
Main & Hwy 99
Cottage Grove