

Preventing Youth Suicide Begins with Community

by Linda Tillmon, LCSW, Rye Youth Council & Nancy Pasquale, RyeACT Coalition

September is National Suicide Prevention Awareness Month. Suicide can be a difficult topic to discuss, but it is an important discussion to have, since suicide is the second leading cause of death among individuals ages 10-34. With early intervention and access to mental health treatment, in many cases suicide can be prevented.

Most of us are keenly aware that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a negative impact on mental health. Recent CDC data suggest that pandemic-related social isolation and feelings of uncertainty, and concerns related to social unrest in the last 18 months have given rise nationally to an increase in reports of anxiety and depression (↑ 31%), trauma-related disorders (↑ 26%), initiation or increase in substance use (↑ 13%), and an increase in thoughts of suicide (↑ 11%), and youth and young adults have been among those most impacted (*CDC, June 2020*). In 2020, 85% of Rye HS student survey respondents indicated they think mental health is an issue for their peers to some degree. (*MH survey, 10/2020*)

Well before the arrival of COVID-19, we had identified youth mental health and suicide prevention as areas of focus for Rye. 2018 RMS/RHS student survey data indicate 16% of 7th-8th graders, and 25% of 9th-12th graders, had thought about suicide (*Pride 2018*), statistics supported by anecdotal reporting and other data. Youth who identify as part of a group(s) that is traditionally marginalized or bullied are at particular risk when low self-acceptance, or lack of support from family, friends, or community exist.

The Rye community had already begun to mobilize before the COVID lockdown in March 2020. Efforts have focused on raising awareness, reducing stigma, encouraging positive coping skills and self-care, and promoting help-seeking from mental health professionals. Some examples include:

Youth:

- Data Collection, Education, Advocacy
- #MentalHealthMatters Sticker Campaign
- #31DaysOfMentalHealth Campaign
- Student-Led mental health attitudes survey & presentations
- Student Organizations (RyeACT, RYC, LETS, GSA, Faith-based youth groups, IDEA, RelateABLE, BPF and more)

Community Organizations:

- Rye Youth Council & RyeACT - Youth Mental Health First Aid training
- Rye Youth Council Youth Educator & Social Work Internship Counseling
- RyeACT Parenting for Prevention, KNOW 2 Prevent, Health & Wellness Team
- Parenting in Changing Times Newsletters
- pRYEde Community Group & pRYEde Family Network, RAISE, Coalition for Change
- Activist Academy Programs
- Resilience Film Screening & Discussion
- Heard in Rye Speaker Series

Schools:

- District Support Staff, ESS supplemental mental health support

- SEL Task Force, SEL Survey
- Race, Inclusivity, and Community Task Force, School Climate Survey
- Challenge Success
- Professional Development
- Collaboration with Rye Youth Council & RyeACT, including upcoming youth-led mental health initiative for the 2021-22 school year

What Can Community Members Do?

Everyone can play a role to support youth mental health and reduce the risk of youth suicide:

- **Reduce stigma**, so young people know it's "okay to not be okay," and create an environment where they feel safe talking about mental health.
- **Learn to recognize signs and symptoms** of a developing mental health challenge.
- **Connect youth** to appropriate **professional help**.
- **Stay Informed:** <https://ryeyouthcouncil.org/> <https://ryeact.com/>
- **Educate Yourself: Youth Mental Health First Aid Training**
Upcoming Dates: Friday, October 22nd & Saturday, November 13th
Register at ryeyouthcouncil.org

Incorporated in 1971 **Rye Youth Council** is a 501(c)3 nonprofit youth development organization that supports the social, emotional, and mental health of young people in our community.

Founded in 2014, **RyeACT** is a coalition of local organizations and individuals committed to promoting long term health and wellness by inspiring youth, parents, and community leaders to foster healthy behaviors and reduce youth substance use. Through our fiscal partner, the Rye YMCA, RyeACT is supported through the federal Drug Free Communities Grant program.

For more information or for support, please contact [Linda Tillmon](mailto:Linda.Tillmon@ryeyouthcouncil.org), RYC Social Work Supervisor, at L.Tillmon@ryeyouthcouncil.org or [Nancy Pasquale](mailto:Nancy.Pasquale@ryeactcoalition@gmail.com), RyeACT Coalition Coordinator, at ryeactcoalition@gmail.com

**For common warning signs that someone is thinking of suicide,
Remember the acronym **FACTS**:**

Feelings:

- *Extreme sadness, hopelessness, worthlessness, trapped, no reason to live
- *Guilt or shame
- *Isolation, withdrawn from others
- *Perceived burdensomeness
- *Unbearable physical and/or emotional pain
- *Rage, vengeance

Acts:

- *Looking for a way to die
- *Seeking access to means (weapons, pills)
- *New or increased use of alcohol and/or other drugs
- *Behaving recklessly
- *Making preparations, such as giving personal items away

Changes:

- *Behavior, mood, affect
- * Extreme mood changes
- *Sleeping too little or too much
- *Sudden Calmness or Euphoria following a mood change

Threats:

- *Wanting to die, wanting to kill oneself
- *Wanting things to be over, do not want to be here

Situations:

- *Life changing events (death of a relative or friend, COVID-19 related changes)
- *Triggers at home, school, social media, bullying

If these warning signs apply to you, or someone you know, get HELP as soon as possible:

- *National Suicide Prevention Hotline: 1-800-TALK (8255), Text SIGNS to 741741
- *Westchester County 24/7 Mobile Crisis Response Line (St. Vincent's): 1-914-925-5959
- *NY State COVID-19 Emotional Support Hotline: 1-844-863-9314
- *Trevor Project Hotline (LGBTQIA+): 1-866-488-7386, Trevor TEXT 678678
- * Rye Youth Council Parent Support:

<https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org>

jedfoundation.org

preventsuicideny.org

**Note to Robin: this page has some images of some of the initiatives listed... in case you have space for any of them...

Some images of the youth sticker campaign (#MentalHealthMatters #GrowingThePositive)



Image from the #31DaysofMentalHealth campaign - messages from youth to adults



Image from the COVID-19 poster project (peer-to-peer messages)

Social Distancing can be hard.

You are NOT alone. We're in this together.

Our community partners have great **FREE** resources for fun activities/creative releases:

- Connect with your faith community for guidance and support with the **House of Knowledge**
- Manage Stress & Connect to Community with **The Youth Council**
- Stay fit online with the **FitMeCafé**
- Access e-Books/Audiobooks, audiobooks, mp3, and more with **The Rye Free Reading Room**
- Access Arts-Related Activities with the **Rye Arts Center**
- Check Out Fun Activities with **Rye Recreation**

There are Things You Can Do

- Talk to a friend or a caring adult
- Make time to "virtually connect" with friends or relatives who make you feel good about yourself
- Listen to music, watch TV/movies, make artwork, draw, journal, etc.
- Make a schedule for yourself that's as strict as "school" as possible
- Take Creative Breaks: draw, write poetry to friends or family members who can't be with you
- Watch old movies/shorts or tv shows (don't worry with the ads)
- Connect online with friends from your team or club
- Check out free streaming content, games, concerts, comedy, sports, movies, puppets, etc.
- Go for a walk/run with a pet, a sibling, or your dog
- Practice Yoga, Meditation or Prayer
- Do puzzles, play board games, Play cards
- Be creative & find a place for some privacy if family disagreements in getting to be less stressful
- Clear clutter of clothes, magazines and other things

You're not alone.

- There are People Who Care: Friends, Teachers, Coaches, Club Advisors, Other Adults (use technology to connect)
- There are People Who Can Help At School: School Psychologists/Social Workers, Guidance Counselors, School Nurses (Reach out to them or check out their Google Classroom pages for resources)

There Are Other Places to Go For Help (see below)

The Trevor Project 1-877-870-5673 thetrevorproject.org

SAMHSA National Helpline (Mental Health & Substance Use Disorders) 1-800-662-HELP

NAMI HelpLine (Mental Health) 1-800-950-NAMI

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline nationalsuicideline.org

National Eating Disorders Association Helpline 1-800-931-2237

IV State HOPeline (Substance Use Treatment) 1-877-4HOPENY

Family Support Navigator Program (Substance Use Treatment & Support) 1-845-228-2700

The Westchester County Department of Health & Mental Health has set up special lines in response to the COVID-19 pandemic:

- For emotional health/mental health support and resources, or to connect with free counseling support call: **Department of Community Mental Health Office** at 914-995-1900 (phone line is active 24/7, 24/7 PM (Mon-Fri) and weekends, message checked and returned every hour)
- Or you can send a text message at any time 24/7 to: 494-461-7281
- For Psychiatric emergency services: **County Crisis Response & Response Team (Dr. Vesce's)** (Mental Health, Substance Use Treatment) 1-914-925-9853
- Virtual Support Meetings for Those Struggling in Place** with a concern over COVID-19 (9/15/20-9/30/20)
 - Every Tuesday at 6:45 PM - Every Wednesday at 5:00 PM (Call or text 845-742-9895)
 - Family Support Meetings 10-11:15 (M-F) (M-F) (Call 845-742-9895 for an appointment)

RyeACT

A Message of Hope, Love, and Solidarity from the RyeACT Youth Action Team