

THE P.E.N.

PARENT EMPOWERMENT NEWSLETTER

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Suicide Prevention Starts with Connection: Knowing the Warning Signs and How to Help

By National Association of School Psychologists (NASP)

September is Suicide Prevention Month—a time to remind ourselves that suicide is preventable and that connection can make a meaningful difference in the life of a young person. Children and teens who are struggling may not always ask for help directly, but they may show signs that something is wrong. Foster, kinship, adoptive, and resource parents are in an important position to notice changes, listen without judgment, and help a young person connect with support.

Know the Warning Signs. Warning signs

can look different from one young person to another. Pay attention to significant changes in behavior, appearance, thoughts, or feelings, especially when several changes happen at the same time. A young person may talk about suicide, death, or wanting to die, either directly or indirectly. They may express hopelessness or say things such as, “I wish I could go to sleep and not wake up.” Other warning signs can include making a suicide plan, posting about suicide online, giving away belongings, *(continued on page 2)*

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withdrawing from family and friends, losing interest in activities they normally enjoy, or experiencing significant changes in mood, behavior, sleep, or appearance. Previous suicidal behavior or self-harm should also always be taken seriously.

A warning sign should never be dismissed as “just looking for attention” or something a young person will simply get over. When something feels different or concerning, it is important to pay attention and reach out.

What Can Caregivers Do?

If you are concerned about a child or teen, ask directly. Talking about suicide does not put the idea into someone's head. A calm and caring question such as, “Are you thinking about suicide?” can open the door to an important conversation.

If a young person says they are thinking about suicide, stay calm and listen. Give them your full attention, take what they are saying seriously, and avoid judgment or minimizing their feelings. Let them know they are not alone and that help is available.

It is also important not to promise to keep suicidal thoughts a secret. If a young person shares that they are thinking about suicide, involve a trusted adult or professional who can help keep them safe. If there is an immediate concern about their safety, do not leave them alone. When possible, help create a safer environment by securing or removing things they could use to hurt themselves, and connect them with appropriate professional support, such as a mental health provider, school counselor, or social worker.

Connection Can Be Protective Suicide prevention isn't only about recognizing

warning signs. It is also about building relationships and creating an environment where children and teens feel safe asking for help.

A caring and supportive relationship with an adult, open communication, positive friendships, a sense of belonging at home and school, healthy coping skills, a sense of purpose and self-worth, and access to mental health and other supportive services can all help strengthen a young person's ability to cope with difficult experiences.

For children and youth who have experienced trauma, loss, abuse, neglect, placement changes, or other difficult experiences, a consistent and caring adult relationship can be especially meaningful. Sometimes prevention begins with something as simple as showing up, listening, and letting a young person know, “You matter to me, and you don't have to go through this alone.”

When You Aren't Sure, Reach Out

You don't have to be a mental health professional to notice that a young person is struggling. If something feels different or concerning, trust your instincts and reach out for help. It is always better to ask a difficult question and connect a young person with support than to ignore a warning sign.

A Reminder for Caregivers

You do not have to have all the answers, and you don't have to fix everything. Sometimes the most important thing you can do is notice, listen, stay connected, and help a young person find the support they need.

Suicide prevention starts with connection—and every caring adult can be part of that connection.



SUICIDE PREVENTION RESOURCES

You are not alone. Help is here.

If you or someone you know is struggling or experiencing thoughts of suicide, support is available 24/7. Reach out—your life matters.



CALL OR TEXT

988

SUICIDE & CRISIS
LIFELINE

Call or text **988**
or chat online at 988lifeline.org

CRISIS HELP NOW



988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline

Call or text **988** or chat online at 988lifeline.org for free, confidential support 24/7.



Crisis Text Line

Text **HOME** to **741741** to connect with a trained crisis counselor.



Emergency

If someone is in immediate danger, call **911** or go to the nearest emergency room.

SUPPORT FOR YOUTH



The Trevor Project

24/7 crisis support for LGBTQ young people. Call **1-866-488-7386**, text **START** to **678678**, or chat at thetrevorproject.org



The Jed Foundation (JED)

Mental health resources and support for teens and young adults. Visit jedfoundation.org



My3 App

Tools to help manage feelings, reduce stress, and connect to support. Download for free in the app store.

ONGOING SUPPORT & MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES



Find a Therapist

Use the SAMHSA Behavioral Health Treatment Services Locator to find mental health support near you. FindTreatment.gov



NAMI HelpLine

Information, resources, and support for individuals and families. Call **1-800-950-NAMI (6264)** Monday–Friday, 10am–10pm ET or visit nami.org/help



School Support

Reach out to your child's school counselor, school psychologist, or social worker for additional support and resources.

YOU CAN HELP



- ♥ Reach out and listen.
- ♥ Take concerns seriously.
- ♥ Encourage them to get help.
- ♥ Stay connected and follow up.
- ♥ Remind them they matter.

Your support can save a life.



A Gentle Reminder

It's okay to not be okay,
and it's okay to ask for help.
You deserve support, hope,
and a future.

You matter.



Hope. Help. Healing.

There is hope, and there is help.

Together, we can make a difference.





Are you a caregiver of a current or former foster youth?
Are you feeling frustrated? Would you like additional support?

FURS Support is Always Available

- 24/7 hotline support via phone, text, and chat.
- Local mobile response support with COVID-19 precautions in place.
- Personalized support and stabilization at the hotline and local level.
- Relevant aftercare support and follow-up.



Family Urgent Response System

The Family Urgent Response System (FURS) includes a statewide hotline as well as local mobile response teams to provide immediate trauma-informed support to current and former foster youth and their caregivers.

Local mobile response teams are comprised of compassionate, trained professionals who are available to provide face-to-face support during critical moments.

Both the statewide hotline and local mobile response teams are available 24/7/365.

FURS Provides Support When Needed Most

Call or Text:
1-833-939-FURS

Online:
CAL-FURS.ORG

SCAN ME



LIVE CHAT



24/7 SUPPORT

Are you a current or former foster youth?
Having problems at home? Frustrated?
Need someone to talk to? The 24/7 FURS hotline is here to help.

CALL OR TEXT: 1-833-939-FURS | 1-833-939-3877

Family Urgent Response System (FURS) is a free 24/7/365 hotline for current or former foster youth and your caregivers to call and get **immediate** help for any big or small issues you may be having.

- You will be connected to a trained counselor or peer who will listen to you.
- FURS is a **safe, judgement-free, and private** space to talk about your worries and vent.
- If you want more support, a team can come directly to where you are to help you work on the problem and to create a plan to help stabilize your situation and keep you safe.
- The team will follow-up by helping connect you and your caregiver to local services and support.



CHECK OUT: CAL-FURS.ORG



www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/cdss-programs/foster-care/furs

SEPTEMBER YOUTH ENRICHMENT ACTIVITY

SAN LUIS OBISPO CHILDREN'S MUSEUM

Join us for an evening of fun at the San Luis Obispo Children's Museum! Explore, create, and play together!

Date: Wednesday, September 16

Time: 5:00–7:00 PM

Location: 1010 Nipomo St., San Luis Obispo, CA 93401

This event is open to all foster and adoptive families in San Luis Obispo County. Immediate family members are welcome to attend.

Enjoy interactive exhibits, hands-on learning, and an evening of family fun!

Please note: Food and drinks will not be provided.



Register Today!

Scan the QR code or visit:

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/slo-childrens-museum-tickets-1996654613698>

SLO FOSTER CARE



How to Talk to Your Teen About Suicide

By National Alliance for Mental Health (NAMI)

“How are you feeling?”

Think about the last time you asked your teen that question. Most likely, what you were really asking was, “Are you physically sick?” And, if you’re anything like me, you immediately entered “fix it mode” if your kid expressed even the slightest physical issue. Doctor’s appointments. Medication. Nourishing meals. As parents, we prioritize our kids’ physical health almost instinctively. But what about their mental health?

For as long as I can remember, “How are you feeling?” was a question I asked only if my children were home sick from school. My perspective on those four words changed forever in March 2018. While my wife and I were away in Mexico celebrating her birthday, we got a text message from our son, Ryan. He told us he loved us and said goodbye. Then, he took his own life — our talkative class clown and gifted storyteller was gone at 14 years old.

As I write this, youth suicide is affecting families across the nation. Since 2007, the suicide rate among American youth ages 10 to 24 has increased by almost 60%. In September 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, kids ages 11 to 17 reported the highest rates of suicidal ideation compared to any other age group.

In the months following Ryan’s death, I absorbed the disheartening statistics. Then, I spoke with countless doctors, community leaders, experts and parents about youth mental health. Through those conversations, I came to believe that parents should start getting more involved with their kids’ mental health.

I’m not a psychologist or a mental health expert.

I’m a guy who lost his son and spent the last year and a half trying to figure out why. But I do know this: If we foster emotional connections with our children, tell our stories and acknowledge our kids’ mental health, we can make critical changes.

I believe these changes can start with rethinking those four simple words: “How are you feeling?”

Get Your Kid Talking

Plenty of parents have all barged into their teens’ rooms and told them, “We need to talk.” This, I believe, isn’t the recipe for meaningful conversations. That room is their sanctuary — their safe place. Your child isn’t likely to talk with you in this situation, let alone open up about their mental health.

Instead, find the place and time when your child wants to talk. Maybe that will be when you’re driving to school or, if you’re like my older son and me, during a round of golf. My conversations with Ryan would usually come after watching a movie together. Looking back, this was a missed opportunity for a deeper connection. At the time, I didn’t know how to ask the right questions.

When you’ve identified the right time and place, ask your child, “How are you feeling?” Then, listen and go deeper. If they say they had a rough day with friends, don’t shrug it off. Ask how that event made them feel and acknowledge what they share.

Stop Fixing (and Start Getting Vulnerable)

These early conversations will help your teen get comfortable sharing how they feel and why. But they’ll also help you get comfortable with reality: You can’t necessarily fix every emotional challenge your child has, no matter how hard you try.

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How to Talk to Your Teen About Suicide (Cont'd from page 7)

The sooner you leave behind the urge to “fix it,” the sooner you can forge a meaningful emotional connection.

I often describe the dynamic like this: If Ryan and I are outside on a sunny day, I can say, “What a beautiful day.” But he’ll still think it’s a cloudy day. Parents have to let their kids experience cloudy days; otherwise, they’ll stop sharing as soon as things get tough. A big part of that process is letting go of the “I can fix it” mentality. But it’s equally important to show your kids that you have cloudy days, too.

One of the biggest mistakes I made with Ryan was making him feel as though everything in my life was perfect. When everything in his life wasn’t perfect, he hid it. By sharing our own experiences, we can help our teens put their feelings into context — when things are going well and when they’re not.

Approach the Topic of Suicide

Once your teen is talking openly about their emotions, keep listening and asking questions. If what they tell you sounds serious or raises any self-harm warning signs, it’s time to broach the subject of suicidal thoughts. Approach the topic by asking your teen a question such as,

“Have you ever felt bad enough that you’ve thought of hurting yourself?”

Many parents feel uncomfortable with this question. The ones I’ve spoken to often worry that the mere mention of suicidal thoughts could put the idea into their child’s head. However, we’re living in a world with endless content — both helpful and harmful — at our children’s fingertips. Your teen has heard about suicide before. And studies show that talking about suicide does not increase its prevalence.

If your child has considered self-harm, explore the “when” and “how.” Are they currently thinking about self-harm? Do they have a plan to act on these thoughts? If the answer to either of those questions is “yes,” it is time to seek professional help. If your child doesn’t have a plan, keep talking. Make sure they understand that thoughts alone don’t make someone suicidal. Then, you can share your own experiences with mental health to help them understand their feelings.

Ultimately, when our children are unwell, we make sure they get the help they need. To prevent teen suicide, we need to approach our children’s mental health with the same sense of compassion, care and ownership as we do their physical well-being. Talking about suicide isn’t necessary for every child and every situation but asking “how do you feel?” always is.

“You have been criticizing yourself for years, and it hasn’t worked. Try approving of yourself and see what happens.”

Louise L. Hay

About the Author: Jason Reid is an entrepreneur, filmmaker and youth mental health advocate. His documentary, *Tell My Story*, chronicles his search for answers in the months following his teenage son’s suicide.

If you or someone you love is having thoughts of suicide, please call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 988. The hotline’s professionals are available to you 24/7/365.



2026 2027 HOMELESS AND FOSTER YOUTH SERVICES COORDINATING PROGRAM

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SCHOOL DISTRICT HOMELESS AND FOSTER YOUTH LIAISONS

Almond Acres Charter Academy – AACA Melissa Moreno 805-221-8550 memoreno@aacacademy.com	Atascadero USD – AUSD Jessica Lloyd 805-462-4200 familiesintransition@atasusd.org	Bellevue-Santa Fe Charter School –BSFCS Kester Bantin 805-595-7169 kbantin@bsfcs.org
Cayucos Elementary – CESD Lisa Jensen 805-995-3694 Ljensen@cayucosschool.org	Coast Unified – CUSD Jill Southern 805-927-6121 jsouthern@coastusd.org	Grizzly Challenge Charter School –GCCS Brandi Baldiviez 805-242-5014 bbaldiviez@mygya.com
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SAVE THE DATE FOR

VERY MERRY LITTLE CHRISTMAS

PARTY



**FOR ALL FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE
FAMILIES IN SLO COUNTY**



Come get your stocking! Free BBQ lunch! Christmas cookie decorating! Carnival booths! Blow ups! Free giveaways! Christmas ornament making! And more!

**SATURDAY
DECEMBER 5TH
11:30AM-2:30 PM**

**GRACE CENTRAL COAST
AT THE CORNER OF
PISMO & OSOS IN SLO**



**Registration Opens
October 1st 2026!**



YOUTH PERSPECTIVE CREATING POSITIVE MEMORIES WHEN RESOURCES ARE LIMITED

When people think about creating memories, they often imagine expensive vacations, big birthday parties, gifts, or special events. But some of the most meaningful memories in life are not created by money. They are created by time, effort, kindness, and feeling like someone cares.

For foster youth, creating positive memories can be especially important. Many children in foster care have experienced loss, trauma, instability, and uncertainty. They may have memories they wish they could forget, and sometimes they need new memories to remind them that their story is not only made up of difficult moments.

Positive memories do not have to be expensive. Sometimes, the smallest moments become the ones we remember the most. A walk outside, watching a movie together, making a favorite meal, playing a game, listening to music, or simply having someone sit down and truly listen can mean more than a costly experience. What matters most is not what you spend—it is the feeling you create.

During my time in foster care, I learned that being cared for was not about someone buying me things. It was about people making me feel seen. One of the people who made a difference in my life was my equine therapist. Spending time with my horse, Harley, became more than just an activity. Brushing her, learning to trust her, and slowly building a connection gave me a place where I could feel calm. When I rode her for the first time, she was gentle and patient with me. Those moments became memories I still carry with me.

My teachers also created positive memories during a difficult time in my life. They gave me patience and understanding when I needed it. Sometimes it was as simple as allowing me extra time, giving me a safe place to go when I felt overwhelmed, or treating me like a person instead of just a student with a difficult background.

For foster youth, those moments matter. A child who has experienced trauma may not remember every gift they receive, but they often remember the person who showed up for them. They remember who listened. They remember who made them laugh. They remember who helped them feel safe.

Creating memories also means celebrating the moments that are often overlooked. A birthday does not have to include a large party to be meaningful. A holiday does not have to involve expensive decorations or presents. Sometimes, a homemade meal, a handwritten card, or someone saying, "I am glad you are here," can mean everything. Many foster youth have experienced feeling like they do not belong. Creating positive memories helps change that message. It tells a child: "You matter. You are worth celebrating. You deserve happiness."

To foster parents, caregivers, teachers, and community members: do not underestimate the power of small moments. You do not need unlimited resources to make a difference in a child's life. You need consistency, compassion, and a willingness to be present. A child may not remember the amount of money spent on them. They will remember how you made them feel.

Positive memories do not erase the painful ones. They do something different—they give children proof that their lives contain moments of kindness, connection, and hope. Every child deserves memories that remind them they are more than what happened to them.

By, LGW

YOUTH PERSPECTIVE

HOW COMMUNITIES CAN BETTER SUPPORT FOSTER YOUTH

Every child deserves to feel safe, valued, and loved. For the hundreds of thousands of children and young adults who experience foster care, those basic needs are often interrupted by circumstances beyond their control. While foster parents and child welfare professionals play an important role, supporting foster youth is not a responsibility that belongs to them alone. Entire communities can make a meaningful difference.

Understand Before You Judge

One of the greatest challenges foster youth face is being misunderstood. Frequent moves, changes in schools, emotional struggles, or difficulty trusting others are often the result of trauma—not a lack of character. Taking the time to understand the realities of foster care helps replace judgment with compassion.

Be a Stable Adult

Not every supportive adult has to become a foster parent. Teachers, coaches, neighbors, mentors, employers, and family friends can all have a lasting impact. Sometimes, simply being a consistent person who listens, encourages, and shows up can change the course of a young person's life.

Support Foster Families

Foster parents need support too. Communities can help by donating clothing, school supplies, diapers, furniture, or gift cards. Offering meals, babysitting, transportation, or simply checking in can reduce stress and help foster families continue providing safe, loving homes.

Create Opportunities

Many foster youth age out of the system without the same support networks many young adults rely on. Businesses can offer internships, part-time jobs, apprenticeships, or scholarships. Colleges and community organizations can provide mentoring, housing assistance, and career guidance that help foster youth build independent futures.

Welcome Them Without Labels

Foster youth often worry about being treated differently once others learn about their background. Including them in sports, clubs, church groups, community events, and friendships without making foster care their defining identity helps them feel like they truly belong.

Advocate for Better Resources

Communities can encourage local leaders to invest in mental health services, affordable housing, educational support, and programs that assist young adults transitioning out of foster care. Strong policies create stronger outcomes for children and families.

Small Acts Matter

Supporting foster youth doesn't always require a major commitment. Donating birthday gifts, volunteering with local organizations, tutoring a student, or simply showing kindness can leave a lasting impression. Small acts of care often become lifelong memories.

A Community Responsibility

Foster youth are more than statistics—they are children and young adults with dreams, talents, and enormous potential. When communities choose compassion over judgment and action over indifference, they help create opportunities for healing, stability, and hope.

No child should feel like they have to face the world alone. By working together, communities can ensure that every foster youth knows they are seen, supported, and valued.

By, LGW

SEPTEMBER IS

SUICIDE PREVENTION MONTH

*You are not alone,
and neither are they.*

Let's work together to create a world of hope, understanding, and support for our children and families.



Be Present



Start the Conversation



Support Each Other





HOPE
HEALING
HELP
There is Help.

Together, we can make a difference. | SUPPORT. LISTEN. EMPOWER. *You Matter.*

A NEWSLETTER FOR FOSTER, KINSHIP & RESOURCE FAMILIES IN SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY





A huge **THANK YOU** to our incredible community partners who helped make our annual Back-to-School Backpack Drive possible!

We are so grateful to everyone who generously contributed backpacks, snacks, school supplies, and other back-to-school items to support foster, adoptive, and kinship families in our community.

A special thank you to Grace Central Coast Church, Legacy Church, Morris & Garritano, The Positive Change Movement and the San Luis Obispo County Office of Education for partnering with us and helping make this event a success. Because of your generosity, over 180 children and youth in our community were able to receive the supplies and essentials they need to head into the new school year feeling prepared, supported, and excited to learn.

Your continued partnership and commitment to local families truly make a difference, and we are so thankful for each of you who helped make this year's Back-to-School Backpack Drive possible!





UPCOMING TRAININGS			
09 SEPT	TBRI for Caregivers Part 3 – Empowering 5:30 pm to 8:30 pm via Zoom	12 SEPT	Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression (SOGIE Training) 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm via Zoom
10 SEPT	TBRI for Caregivers Part 1 – Intro and Overview 6:00 pm to 9:00 pm via Zoom	17 SEPT	TBRI for Caregivers Part 2 – Connecting Principles 6:00 pm to 9:00 pm via Zoom
11 SEPT	CWA – Be the Boss of Your Brain – Helping Youth Take Charge of Thoughts 9:00 am to 1:00 pm via Zoom	24 SEPT	Sexual and Reproductive Wellness (SB89) & Human Trafficking 5:30 pm to 8:30pm via Zoom



Interested in becoming a foster family, or know someone who might be?

We are actively recruiting new resource homes for children of all ages. If you know someone who lives in San Luis Obispo County and is interested in becoming a resource family, please encourage them to call us at 805-781-1705 for more information about the process.

SLO FOSTER CARE 

For more information on available trainings, see our event calendar at www.slofostercare.com
To register for a training, call (805) 781-1705

