

It's Time We Addressed Canada's Disturbing Suicide Rates

World Suicide Prevention Day is highlighted annually in September and you may have heard that the Canadian government has promised to establish a national suicide-response line by the end of this year. We think that is a good idea. The Family Life Centre has some [excellent resources](#) for anyone who wants to educate themselves about this important topic. You can find those details at the end of this article.

But first, we wanted to shed some light on the current state of suicide in Canada.

September's day of awareness comes at the end of summer, the season with the highest suicide rate of any time of year. (Suicides spike in July and August, according to the Canadian Mental Health Association.)

And with vulnerable teens now going back to school, we are about to enter what the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) calls the "suicide season," particularly for indigenous youth.

To be clear, we're not trying to shock anyone with these facts. We're not here to ruin your day with more depressing stats. What we hope is that more people will understand the severity of this issue and find the courage to break the stigma.

After all, we're talking about a public health issue.

Suicide has been the leading cause of death in young adults aged 15 to 34, second only to accidents, since the year 2000. Isn't it about time we broke the silence?

We know it's not easy. People genuinely want to help, but often feel reluctant to talk about what they don't understand. That's why we've put together these facts and suggestions for how to help someone with suicidal thoughts and feelings.

What you read might surprise you, but more importantly, we hope it helps you know what to do when someone in your life is struggling.

1. Suicide is extremely common.

Because of the stigma attached to suicide, outdated myths and misconceptions prevail. One blogger wrote that before her brother died by suicide, she had assumed it was only a problem for the rich and famous, the severely addicted, and other "extreme cases."

The truth is, suicide happens in every age group and stage of life, regardless of economic status or cultural background. According to a 2013 report from [Stats Canada](#), it is almost as common for an adult to die by suicide (17%) as it is to die of cancer (20%).

But some demographics are at higher risk of suicide than others. They are the following:

- Indigenous people and the Inuit living in Northern Canada
- Youth aged 15-29
- Inmates in correctional facilities
- People who have experienced a major loss (e.g. death of a loved one)
- People with mental illness or serious addiction problems
- People who have previously attempted suicide
- People with a family history of suicide
- The elderly

2. Attempts are more common than most people think.

Here's where things get staggering. The 2014 World Health Organization report indicates that for each adult who died of suicide there have been more than 20 others who attempted suicide. This means that if 11 Canadians will end their lives by suicide today (and based on the [Canadian Association of Suicide Prevention](#) 2014 report, this is accurate), more than 220 people will also try to end their life in the next 24 hours.

The [stats](#) also tell us that four out of five people in Canada who die by suicide have made a previous attempt. This puts them at greater risk to complete suicide in the future.

People tend to think men suicide more often than women, and this is in fact the case. More men in Ontario died by suicide between 1990 and 2000 than by car crashes (source: [CMHA](#)). But what most people don't know is that women attempt suicide more often than men - three to four times more, to be exact. In Ontario, women are also hospitalized for attempted suicide 1.5 times more often than men.

3. Most people give warning signs.

[CAMH](#) reports most people who have died by suicide have also shown warning signals that they were thinking of ending their lives. They include:

- A sudden change in mood or behaviour
- A sense of hopelessness or helplessness
- Expressing a wish to die or end their life
- Increased substance use
- Withdrawal from people and activities they previously enjoyed
- Changes in sleeping patterns
- A decreased appetite
- Giving away prized possessions or making preparations for their death (e.g. creating a will)

Suicide is preventable. If we can begin to train our minds to notice these signs, we can make a difference.

4. Mental health is a risk factor.

Risk of suicide is deeply connected with mental health. According to the Mental Health Commission of Canada ([MHCC](#)), 90% of people who died by suicide were experiencing a mental health problem or illness. In many cases, suicidal feelings are linked with anxiety and depression.

Regardless of how long someone has struggled with mental health challenges, they should be taken seriously and treated with compassion. This leads to the next and most critical point.

5. You can help.

People are often reluctant to intervene, even if they are quite concerned about someone. There can be many reasons for this, but often it's because they worry they won't know what to say, or that they'll somehow make the situation worse.

The truth is, there is no formula for helping someone.

But there is good news. You don't need to have all the answers.

Far more than advice, what most people want is someone who will listen non-judgmentally and take them seriously. To be clear, encouraging someone to talk about their suicidal thoughts and feelings - even asking outright if they've made plans - is helpful and will help them feel truly seen and heard. Most people think bringing up suicide will only make things worse when in reality it reduces stress in a person.

If your friend, coworker, loved one, or neighbour feels comfortable talking about their suicidal feelings with you, then the next step is to encourage them to seek help. Let them know that help is available and refer them to your local crisis line (see the contact list below and on the CAMH website).

And remember to seek support for yourself. This is really important: don't try to bear this burden alone. The best way to help care for someone else is always to take care of yourself, even in the areas of mental health.

At the Family Life Centre, we offer training in [mental health first aid](#) certified by the MHCC. These two-day workshops are offered twice a year and open to anyone who interacts with adults or youth and wants to be confident in helping others get the support they need for suicide prevention and other mental health issues.

Together, we can end the stigma.

Further Resources: Distress Lines

The following helplines are, unless otherwise indicated, open 24 hours a day. For more information and tips, visit the CAMH website, www.camh.ca.

Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) courses:

1. MHFA For Adults Who Interact with Youth:

<http://www.tyndale.ca/family-life/events/mhfa-youth>

2. MHFA Basic (Adults): <http://www.tyndale.ca/family-life/events/mhfa-basic>

Email FLC@tyndale.ca or call 416.226.6620 ext. 4206

Toronto Distress Centres: 416-408-4357 or 408-HELP

Gerstein Centre: 416-929-5200

Telecare (Mandarin & Cantonese): 416-920-0497

Contact Centre Telecare Peel (English, Punjabi, Hindi, Urdu, Spanish, Portuguese):
905-459-7777

Assaulted Women's Helpline: 416-863-0511, Toll-free: 1-866-863-0511

Warm Line, Progress Place: 416-960-9276 or 416-960-WARM, *every day from 8pm to 12 midnight*

Kids Help Phone: 1-800-668-6868

Distress Centre Peel: 905-278-7208

Durham Crisis Line: 905-666-0483

Oakville Distress Centre: 905-849-4541

Need someone to talk to? Visit the Family Life Centre today: www.tyndaleflc.ca

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