

# SCHOOL CONNECTEDNESS: A VITAL TOOL IN YOUTH SUICIDE PREVENTION

## Why Suicide Prevention Matters in Our Schools

For most of the United States, youth from kindergarten to twelfth grade spend an average of 180 days in school, not including weekends, after-school hours, or breaks spent in extracurricular activities. <sup>(1)</sup>

Given the amount of time spent, the environment of our schools and the experiences our youth have in them must reflect their ever-evolving needs, especially as they pertain to their health and safety. With the consistent increase in suicidal ideation, attempts, suicide death among youth, it is time for schools to act. It can be as simple as paying attention to the culture of our schools and making **school connectedness** a priority.

Suicide is the **second leading cause of death among school-aged youth aged 10-19.**<sup>(2)</sup>

According to the most recent [Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System \(YRBS\)](#), in 2023:

- > Two in ten students seriously considered attempting suicide, and **almost one in ten students attempted suicide.**
- > Female and LGBTQ+ students were more likely than their peers to experience persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness, poor mental health, and suicidal thoughts and behaviors.
- > Four in ten high school students experienced persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness.

Preteen suicide **rates have increased 8% annually between 2008–2022.**<sup>(7)</sup>

The total number of **suicide deaths for those 10-14 in 2023 was 481.** This was the second leading cause of death in the age group, second only to unintentional injuries.<sup>(8)</sup>

# School Connectedness as a Protective Factor

## What are Protective Factors?

### Protective Factors

A range of conditions at the individual, relationship, community, and societal levels that can reduce the risk of suicidal thoughts or behaviors and promote positive outcomes.<sup>(3)</sup>

Some examples include:

- > Support from friends, family, and partners.
- > Feeling connected to community, school, and other social institutions.
- > Strong sense of cultural identity.
- > Effective problem-solving and coping skills.
- > Reduced access to lethal means of suicide among people at risk.

## What is School Connectedness?

### School Connectedness

The belief held by students that the adults in their school—administrators, teachers, and custodial staff—as well as their peers—care as much about them as individuals as they do about their academics.

When students feel connected to their school system, including their peers, school staff, and the cultural identity and values of their school's community, they are more likely to engage in healthy behaviors that strengthen their protective factors against suicide.<sup>(4)</sup>

According to the [CDC](#), when youth have a sense of school connectedness, they are **less likely** to experience:

- > Poor mental health.
- > Substance use.
- > Sexual health risks.
- > Violence.

And **more likely** to:

- > Engage in positive, healthy behaviors such as physical activity and healthy eating, contributing to overall mental well-being.
- > Have higher grades and test scores, have better school attendance, and graduate from high school.

# School Connectedness is for *Everyone*

When school connectedness is prioritized for every student, the school can reach those who most often feel the effects of alienation or isolation. **School connectedness is a potential aid** in remedying feelings that can often create long-lasting social, emotional, and mental health impacts on young people.

Students with disabilities, students in the LGBTQIA+ community, students who are unhoused, or those students who experience frequent absences for a variety of reasons often report higher levels of alienation and, therefore are the ones who need school connectedness the most. <sup>(4)</sup>

## Suicide Rates: Children Under 13 <sup>(2)</sup>

2X

Black Children

1X

White Children

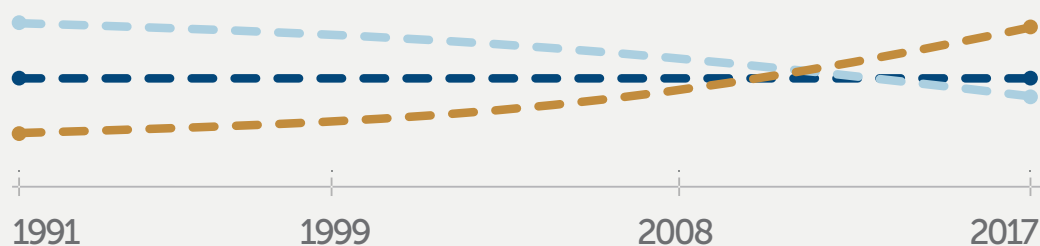
In 2021, suicide was the third leading cause of death for Black youth aged 10-24. <sup>(5)</sup>

> According to the [Trevor Project's 2024 U.S. National Survey on the Mental Health of LGBTQ+ Young People](#), 39 percent of young people identifying as LGBTQ+ seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year, including nearly half, 46 percent, of all transgender and non-binary youth surveyed. It also found that more than 1 in 10 (12 percent) of LGBTQ+ youth had attempted suicide in the past year.

American Indian/Alaska Native youth in the United States have the highest rates of suicide.

In 2019, the age-adjusted suicide rate among AI/AN youth aged 10-19 years in the United States (23.6 per 100,000) was nearly 3x the rate for white youth (7.7 per 100,000) and over 4 times higher than rates for Black, Asian Pacific Islander, and Hispanic youth. <sup>(2)</sup>

## Youth Suicide Attempt Rate <sup>(2)</sup>



### Legend

- Black Youth
- White Youth
- Other Racial/Ethnic Groups

# The Six Strategies for Increasing School Connectedness

In 2009, the CDC, in collaboration with the National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion Division of Adolescent and School Health, published [\*School Connectedness: Strategies for Increasing Protective Factors Among Youth\*](#).

Below are the six key strategies identified to increase school connectedness and, therefore, increase the protective factors against suicide that school-aged youth are exposed to.<sup>(6)</sup>

- 1 Develop decision-making processes that foster student, family, and community engagement, academic achievement, and staff empowerment.

> EX: Empower students to communicate openly with school staff and parents by providing a school-wide system where students are free to give in-depth, constructive, and honest evaluations of their teachers.<sup>(6)</sup>

- 2 Provide education and opportunities to enable families to be actively involved in their children's academic and school life.

> EX: Provide accessible workshops for parents that teach academic support skills, such as how to talk with teachers about ways they can help their children develop academic skills. Ways to increase accessibility include offering virtual, weeknight, or weekend options as well as providing free childcare and snacks for the whole family.<sup>(6)</sup>

- 3 Provide students with academic, emotional, and social skills necessary to be actively engaged in school.

> EX: Utilize both pre-planned classroom activities and lessons as well as real-life "teachable moments" to explore and discuss empathy, personal strengths, fairness, kindness, and social responsibility.<sup>(6)</sup>

- 4 Use effective classroom management and teaching methods to foster a positive learning environment. The CDC has detailed examples of classroom management approaches that build school connectedness [here](#).

- 5 Provide professional development and support to teachers and other school staff, enabling them to meet the diverse cognitive, emotional, and social needs of children and adolescents.

> EX: Enable teachers to learn from one another by building learning teams. This provides an opportunity for experienced teachers to model the application of effective classroom management techniques and facilitate group work in a way that values students' thoughts and opinions.<sup>(6)</sup>

- 6 Create trusting and caring relationships that promote open communication among administrators, teachers, staff, students, families, and communities. Create programs and initiatives that enable students, parents, and families to reserve and utilize the school building and property outside of school hours for recreational or health promotion programs.<sup>(6)</sup>

# Additional Reading and Resources

Although *School Connectedness: Strategies for Increasing Protective Factors Among Youth* was first published more than ten years ago, the CDC continues to encourage the importance and implementation of school connectedness and youth suicide prevention. Below are links to more recent CDC publications on youth suicide, protective factors, and school connectedness.

> [School Connectedness Helps Students Thrive](#)

> [Risk and Protective Factors for Suicide](#)

> [What Schools Can Do to Promote School Connectedness](#)

> [Promoting School Connectedness Through Restorative Practices](#)

## GET IN TOUCH

For more information on school connectedness, youth suicide prevention, and resources, please visit [www.prevention.org/mhmta](http://www.prevention.org/mhmta)



800.252.8951



[www.prevention.org](http://www.prevention.org)



[mhmta@prevention.org](mailto:mhmta@prevention.org)

### Sources:

- (1) Length of school year, school day varies by state,  
<https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/09/07/in-the-u-s-180-days-of-school-is-most-common-but-length-of-school-day-varies-by-state/>
- (2) Youth Suicide Prevention and Intervention: Best Practices and Policy Implications,  
<https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-031-06127-1>
- (3) Risk and Protective Factors for Suicide,  
[https://www.cdc.gov/suicide/risk-factors/index.html#cdc\\_risk\\_factors\\_who-many-factors-protect-against-suicide-risk](https://www.cdc.gov/suicide/risk-factors/index.html#cdc_risk_factors_who-many-factors-protect-against-suicide-risk)
- (4) School Connectedness,  
<https://www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/programs/safe-supportive/school-connectedness>
- (5) Black Youth Suicide Prevention Initiative,  
<https://www.samhsa.gov/mental-health/suicidal-behavior/prevention-initiatives/black-youth-suicide>
- (6) School connectedness; strategies for increasing protective factors among youth,  
<https://stacks.cdc.gov/view/cdc/5767>
- (7) Increases Found in Preteen Suicide Rate,  
<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/news/science-updates/2024/increases-found-in-teen-suicide-rate>
- (8) WISQARS Leading Causes of Death Visualization Tool,  
<https://wisqars.cdc.gov/lcd/?o=LCD&y1=2023&y2=2023&ct=10&cc=ALL&g=00&s=0&r=0&ry=2&e=0&ar=lcd1age&at=groups&ag=lcd1age&a1=0&a2=199>