

## 2014 Washington State Healthy Youth Survey Facts about Depressive Feelings and Suicide

**Background:** Every two years the Washington State Healthy Youth Survey (HYS) provides data for state and local prevention planning. In the fall of 2014, 223,000 students in grades 6, 8, 10 and 12 participated in the HYS. About 1,000 schools enrolled in the survey, representing all 39 Washington counties and 215 school districts. The state agencies supporting the HYS are the Department of Social and Health Services, the Department of Health, the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instructions, and the Liquor Control Board.

A high number of teens report depressive feelings, and many have suicidal thoughts or have attempted suicide. Although most suicides can be prevented, suicide is the second leading cause of death for Washington youth.

### **Depressive feelings:**

- Students were asked if they ever felt so sad or hopeless every day for two weeks in a row that they stopped doing some usual activities. 27 percent of 8<sup>th</sup> graders, 35 percent of 10<sup>th</sup> graders, and 34 percent of 12<sup>th</sup> graders report having depressive feelings in the past year.
- The percentages increased significantly from 2012 for both 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders. In 2012, 31 percent of 10th graders and 30 percent of 12th graders reported having depressive feelings.

### **Suicidal thoughts:**

- In 2014, 16 percent of 8<sup>th</sup> graders, 20 percent of 10<sup>th</sup> graders and 18 percent of 12<sup>th</sup> graders seriously considered suicide in the past year. These results were similar to percentages in 2012.

### **Made a suicide plan:**

- In 2014, 14 percent of 8<sup>th</sup> graders, 16 percent of 10<sup>th</sup> graders and 14 percent of 12<sup>th</sup> graders made a plan for how they would attempt suicide.
- For 10<sup>th</sup> graders, this is a significant increase from 2012, when 14 percent said they had made a suicide plan.

### **Attempted suicide:**

- Among 10<sup>th</sup> graders, 10 percent reported they had attempted suicide in the past year.
- This is a significant increase from 2012, when 8 percent said they had attempted suicide. Prior to this increase the results had been consistent since the 2002 survey.
- In 2014, nine percent of 8<sup>th</sup> graders and eight percent of 12<sup>th</sup> graders reported they had attempted suicide in the past year.

### **Lack of adult support:**

- About 15 percent of 10<sup>th</sup> graders reported that they have no adults to turn to when they feel sad or hopeless.
- This was also reported by about 13 percent of 8<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders.
- These percentages have been consistent since the question was first asked in 2006.

### **Higher incidence among certain groups:**

- Compared to males, a higher percentage of female students reported feeling sad, and considering or attempting suicide.
- Compared to Non-Hispanic White students, a higher percentage of Hispanic students reported feeling sad and attempting suicide, and a higher percentage of American Indian and Alaska Native students reported feeling sad, not having an adult to turn to when feeling sad or hopeless, and considering or making a suicide plan.

## What Can I Do to Prevent Teen Suicide?

Parents, friends, teachers, and coaches can make a difference by taking these steps:

1. **Know the signs of depression in children and youth.** Many youth who attempt suicide have a history of depression. This [booklet](#) by the Youth Suicide Prevention Program gives a list of signs of depression in preschool, school-age, and adolescent youth and resources for help.
2. **Watch for warning signs of suicidal thinking**
  - Previous suicide attempts, talk of suicide, or making a plan.
  - Giving away prized possessions.
  - Expressions of hopelessness, helplessness or anger at oneself or the world.
  - Themes of death or depression in conversation, writing, reading or art.
  - Statements of not being missed if dead.
  - Recent loss of a friend, family member or parent, through death or divorce.
  - Alcohol or other drug use.
  - Chronic headaches, stomachaches, fatigue.
3. **Learn about [risk and protective factors](#) for youth suicide.**
4. **Show you care:**
  - Often, suicidal thinking comes from a wish to end deep psychological pain. Death seems like the only way out, but it isn't.
  - Let the person know you really care. Talk about your feelings and ask about his or hers.
  - Listen carefully to what they have to say.
5. **Ask the question, “Are you thinking about suicide?”**
  - Don't hesitate to raise the subject. Talking with young people about suicide won't put the idea in their heads.
  - Be direct in a caring way. Ask if they are thinking about suicide, if they really want to die, or if they simply want their problems to go away.
  - Learn more about preventing youth suicide at [www.yspp.org](http://www.yspp.org).

### Get help:

You don't need to handle this alone. There are several resources for help during a crisis, and referrals to services:

- **The Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK(8225)**
- **The Trevor Project Lifeline for LGBTQ concerns: 1-866-488-7386**
- **The Washington Recovery Help Line: 1-866-789-1511**

### Youth suicide prevention efforts sponsored by state agencies:

- DSHS funds crisis response services within [Regional Support Networks](#), and suicide prevention and mental health promotion programs in tribes and nine [Community Prevention and Wellness Initiative](#) coalitions across Washington.
- DSHS and OSPI sponsor [Youth Mental Health First Aid](#) trainings through Educational Service Districts and community coalitions.
- DOH is leading the development of a state suicide prevention plan in coordination with other partners, which is due to the legislature in November 2015.
- The DOH Injury and Violence Prevention Program contracts with the [Youth Suicide Prevention Program](#) to support local suicide prevention coalitions and deliver suicide prevention education and training statewide.
- DOH is serving three rural counties (Grays Harbor, Pacific and Clallam) through a youth suicide prevention grant. Grant activities include hospital discharge follow-up, behavioral health and chemical dependency services, suicide prevention training, media campaigns, an annual suicide prevention conference, and services to tribes.
- Information about youth suicide prevention, data and best practices is available on the [Injury and Violence Prevention](#) website.