Depression and suicide

*Why would we devote a whole issue of September’s newsletter to the subject of suicide?*

Because it is a preventable cause of all-too-frequent deaths here and across the country. And because we think, with the information offered in this newsletter, that we can help.

Take a look at this graph below. The numbers may surprise you. It is telling that in ten years, the difference between motor vehicle and suicide deaths in Tennessee narrowed to the point that they were practically equal (958 motor vehicle deaths in 2012 versus 956 suicide deaths). I encourage you to read these articles. It won’t take long, and it might make a difference in someone’s life, maybe even yours. When a person takes his or her own life, we are left to ask the question ‘why?’ One common reason is that the person was suffering from severe depression.

![Graph from the 2014 Status of Suicide in Tennessee Report, Tennessee Suicide Prevention Network. Data from Tennessee Department of Health](image)

**Depression’s link to suicide**

From relationship breakups to financial or legal crises to having been bullied, many external factors can lead a person to consider suicide.

-Suicide is usually the result of a battle with depression. Severe depression can distort your thinking and interfere with your ability to solve painful problems. When you are depressed, the problems seem permanent.

-Awareness is essential. You may not know that you are depressed. The people around you may not recognize your need for help.

-Suicidal thoughts are not a weakness or character flaw. They are symptoms of a treatable illness associated with an imbalance of chemicals in the brain. Other medical conditions can also contribute to depression. A person cannot just “snap out of” depression and thoughts of suicide.

-Getting help is crucial. There are many different medications and therapies available for the successful treatment of depression. You can find a provider in your area through your ParTNers EAP.

Visit [www.Here4TN.com](http://www.Here4TN.com) now!
Coping with suicidal thoughts

If you have thoughts of suicide, it is important to recognize these thoughts for what they are: expressions of a treatable medical illness. When you are depressed, problems seem overwhelming. Although it can be very hard, try to remember that the problems are temporary. You can recover!

Here are some tips on how to seek help:

- **Talk with someone as soon as possible.** It is very important to share your feelings with someone you trust. This could be a friend, family member, therapist, member of the clergy, teacher, family doctor, or an experienced counselor with ParTNers EAP. Let them know how bad things are for you now. Do not go it alone.

- **Create and use a safety plan.** Develop a set of steps that you can follow during a suicidal crisis. It should include emergency contact numbers for your doctor or therapist, for friends and family members who can help you, and for the ParTNers EAP line. So that those around you are prepared if you call on them, educate them about your condition before there is a crisis. Keep a copy of your safety plan with you so you can refer to it or give it to someone else helping you during a crisis.

- **Avoid drugs, alcohol and other risks.** Most deaths by suicide result from sudden, uncontrolled impulses. Since drugs and alcohol contribute to such impulses, it is vital to avoid them. Drugs and alcohol also interfere with the effectiveness of medications prescribed for depression. Also, remove things from your home that you could use to hurt yourself such as pills, knives, razors, or firearms.

- **Get some exercise and outdoor time.** Each day, get out in the sun or into nature. Strive for 30 minutes of exercise per day. You can start small, walking around the neighborhood with a friend or doing brief 10-minute indoor workouts.

- **Do things you enjoy.** Even if few things bring you pleasure now, force yourself to do what you have enjoyed previously. Engage in your favorite hobby or do whatever brings you enjoyment—whether it is bike riding, reading, gardening, restoring an old car or walking your dog. Such activities can serve as a distraction from repeated negative, suicidal thoughts. Taking a break to do something you enjoy can help, even briefly.

Identifying depression symptoms

The second week of September is National Suicide Prevention Week. Your ParTNers EAP is here to help with this most sensitive of personal issues. In a private and supportive manner, your ParTNers professionals offer vital help at the right time. This can put you or your loved ones back on track to wellness and safety. Signs of depression vary depending on the person. There are some signs that might indicate suicidal tendencies. Experts say that if at least five of these symptoms exist, suicide is a very serious and immediate concern:

- Intense sadness for at least two weeks
- Change in appetite or weight
- Change in sleeping patterns
- Speaking and/or moving with unusual speed or slowness
- Loss of interest or pleasure in the usual activities
- Withdrawal and isolation from family and friends
- Decrease in sexual drive
- Fatigue or loss of energy
- Feelings of worthlessness, self-reproach or guilt
- Thoughts about death, wishing for death or having not being born, or statements such as, “There’s nothing left to live for”
- Diminished ability to think or concentrate, slowed thinking, or indecisiveness
- Having obtained items that could be used in a suicide such as a gun or medications
- Increased use of drugs or alcohol.

If you recognize a number of these symptoms in yourself, a friend or loved one, contact a mental health provider, physician, or suicide/crisis hotline for advice and help.
Getting help

People with depression often think only of things that are dark and sad. This “selective memory” is a temporary symptom of depression. It does NOT define who you are. While it can be hard to overcome such negative thinking, don’t let hopelessness, fear or embarrassment stop you from seeking help if you need it.

• **Contact your ParTNers EAP.** Confidential help is available to you 24/7 by phone at 1.855.Here4TN (1.855.437.3486). Go to www.HERE4TN.com to learn more about depression and suicide. Taking a confidential depression self-assessment also can help. Look for the Depression Screening link under the For Members subheading on the left side of the web page.

• **Talk about your feelings with a “lifeline” counselor.** Through the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255), you can reach a skilled crisis counselor. All calls are confidential. Online crisis chat is available at www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org.

• **Lean on friends and family.** Remember that you’re not alone. A trusted friend or family member can help you find solutions that you may not be able to see now. Give them a chance to help you!

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How to talk to someone about suicide

The pain of depression and suicidal thoughts can cause you to isolate yourself. This is a natural reaction to agonizing feelings. It helps to share these feelings with someone else. However, even when you’ve chosen someone to talk to, it can be hard to admit your suicidal thoughts. Some tips:

• Tell the person exactly what you are telling yourself. If you have a suicide plan, explain it to them.

• Phrases such as, “I can’t take it anymore” are vague and do not illustrate how serious things really are. Tell the person that you are considering suicide.

• If it is too difficult to talk about, write it down and hand a note to the person. Or, send them an email or text.

• If you do not feel that the person understands your situation, tell someone else, call ParTNers EAP or a suicide crisis helpline. There are plenty of people who will understand.

Sources: Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA), Helpguide.org.