

## What to know about National Suicide Prevention Month | Opinion



It can be difficult to talk to a loved one about suicide. And while there are several do's and don'ts, the worst thing to do is nothing. (Bluelvy Communications/Courtesy)

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While September is recognized nationally as Suicide Prevention Awareness Month, it's important to remember that suicides take place every hour of the day, every day of the week, and every month of the year. It is important to be aware and recognize behaviors that indicate risk of suicide. Knowing where to go for help is essential in providing residents of our South Florida community a bridge to safety and healing when dealing with mental illness.

U.S. suicide rates reached an all-time high in 2022, with 49,500 people known to have died by suicide last year alone, according to the Centers for Disease Control. Additional information collected by the CDC to date suggests suicides are more common in our country now than at any time since the beginning of World War II.

Thoughts of suicide affect individuals of all ages and backgrounds and are often grounded in mental illness that has not been addressed. Our South Florida-based Jewish Family Services organizations, including Ferd & Gladys Alpert JFS, Ruth & Norman Rales JFS, Goodman JFS, and Jewish Community Services of South Florida, continue to see an increase demand for mental health services from residents in tri-county communities. For this reason, four partner agencies that have a long standing history of serving Miami-Dade, Broward and Palm Beach counties are joining their collective voice and resources to raise awareness about the availability of mental health crisis counseling services provided by community-based social services organizations.

The signs that indicate a person may be considering suicide and needs help include:

- Talking about such things as: wanting to die, feelings of hopelessness, experiencing unbearable pain or being trapped, being a burden to others.
- Looking for a way to kill themselves, like searching online or buying a gun.
- Exhibiting extreme mood swings, acting anxious, seeming agitated or behaving recklessly, including increasing the use of alcohol or drugs.
- Sleeping more or less than usual and withdrawing or isolating themselves.
- Showing rage or talking about seeking revenge.
- Extreme mood swings.

What can you do if you see these signs? Immediately seek help by calling the national 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. Lifeline counselors offer free, confidential, 24/7/365 crisis counseling support in English, Spanish, Creole, and many other languages. Counselors are available to provide free crisis intervention to members of the community struggling with thoughts of suicide, anxiety or depression. In addition to 24/7/365 availability for phone calls, support services are also available by texting 988.

In the local community, Jewish Family Services agencies offer additional resources. For example, Alpert JFS offers its own Community Access Life Line (C.A.L.L.) by dialing 561-684-1991 to receive information, intake and referral services. The support and guidance provided by C.A.L.L.'s professional staff often saves lives.

It can be difficult to talk to a loved one about suicide. And while there are several do's and don'ts, the worst thing to do is nothing. Here is a list compiled by 998.lifeline.org to keep in mind:

- Be direct. Talk openly and matter-of-factly about suicide.
- Be willing to listen. Allow expressions of feelings. Accept those feelings.
- Be nonjudgmental. Don't debate whether suicide is right or wrong, or whether feelings are good or bad. Don't lecture on the value of life.
- Get involved. Become available. Show interest and support.
- Do not dare him or her to do it.
- Do not act shocked. This will put distance between you.
- Seek support. Don't be sworn to secrecy.
- Offer hope that alternatives are available but do not offer glib reassurance.
- Take action. Remove means, like weapons or pills.
- Get help from people or agencies specializing in crisis intervention and suicide prevention.

In North Palm Beach County, reach out to Alpert JFS (561-684-1991); in South Palm Beach County, call Rales JFS at 561-852-3333; in Broward County, call Goodman JFS at 954-909-0888; and in Miami-Dade County, call/text Jewish Community Services at 988.

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