

Suicide prevention involves all of us

Health care providers continue to try to chip away at the mental health crisis across the country. And [the numbers](#) drive home the point:

- The [National Institute of Mental Health](#) says nearly one in five adults suffers from a mental illness.
- The [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC) says suicide is the second-leading cause of death among young people and, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, was the 10th-leading cause of death among all Americans.
- The CDC says in 2020, someone took their own life about once every 11 minutes on average.
- The suicide lifeline says for every one person who dies by suicide each year, 316 people seriously consider it.
- The lifeline has fielded more than 20 million calls since it launched in 2005, and it's seen mostly year-to-year growth in calls. In 2005, the lifeline saw around 50,000 inquiries. In 2020, there were nearly 2.4 million calls – a record high.

The numbers line up with what Staci Knox and her staff are seeing in at [OSF HealthCare in Alton, Illinois](#) – an increase in people seeking help. Some have suffered in silence for a long time. Knox, the manager of Psychological Services at OSF in Alton, says the average time from onset of symptoms to diagnosis is 11 years.

“You think about our culture, it's very much an admirable trait to be tough and to just buck up and get through it,” Knox says. “It's not easy to experience symptoms and then be able to identify that they're not fleeting.”

Warning signs

Knox and her staff see a wide range of patients - from kids as young as six to some people well into their 90s. She says warning signs for suicide vary by age.

For adults: “They're struggling to get out of bed. They're struggling to not call off for work. At work, they're struggling not to be written up for like irritability or conflicts that happen in the workplace. In their home life, they may be struggling in their relationships. They may be isolating,” Knox says.

Some other signs in adults may be tough to spot. For example, a big shopping trip may seem just like a spending spree. But for a suicidal person, they may be spending all their money because they know they can't take it with them.

For children, Knox says their world boils down to school, family and friends. So many of the warning signs are similar but on a reduced scale: no interest in school, acting out at school and isolating from friends and family. Kids may also start using drugs or alcohol.

Daily self-care

Whether you're getting mental health treatment or not, Knox highlights some daily to-dos to keep yourself grounded: eat healthy, get enough sleep, take time for deep breathing and practice your faith.

“Stretching and keeping our body moving,” Knox adds. “Depending on your physical limitations, it could be stretching in a chair or getting out in nature and hiking.”

A new tool

Beginning July 16th, 9-8-8 will be the digits to dial to reach the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. If you’re dealing with a mental or behavioral health issue, you can call or text 9-8-8 to be connected with a trained counselor who’s part of the existing National Suicide Prevention Lifeline network. The counselors you’ll speak to are stationed at crisis centers across the country, so they are likely aware about specific resources and treatment available in your area. Those could include outpatient counseling, inpatient (live-in) care, medication or a combination.

The 9-8-8 lifeline is confidential, free and staffed 24/7. But like any other hotline, there may be a wait. If you or someone you know is in immediate danger or needs medical attention, call 9-1-1. You can always talk to your [primary care provider](#) about [mental and behavioral health resources](#). In fact, Knox says your provider should be able to figure out if your symptoms are indeed related to mental health, if they are a physical problem disguised as a mental problem or if they are a bit of both.