



utah department of
human services

News Release

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New Data Show that Family, Religious Activity Protect Youth from Suicide Ideation

(Salt Lake City, UT) – A new report from the Utah Department of Health (UDOH) showed that in 2013, 14.1% of students in grades 8, 10, and 12 reported that during the past year they had seriously considered suicide. However, students who had positive family environments and attended religious services weekly were less likely to have considered suicide.

“We tend to focus on risk factors when we talk about suicide prevention,” said Jenny Johnson with the UDOH Violence and Injury Prevention Program. “But for the first time, we have Utah-specific data that pinpoints factors that can protect youth from suicide. Prevention efforts should focus on improving family communication and relationships.”

The report compared the effects of positive peer, school, community, and family environments and found that, of these, only the family environment had a significant effect on suicide ideation. Students who had a positive family environment were 25% less likely to report suicide ideation. Positive family factors included if youth felt that their parents considered their input in making family decisions, that they had opportunities to do fun things together as a family, and that they felt they could ask their parents for help when they had a personal problem. Having family meals together five or more days a week also lowered the risk of suicide ideation by half.

“Sixty-percent of students surveyed reported they attended religious services or activities once or more a week,” said Johnson. “These youth were about half as likely to have considered suicide. Even among those who’d had an episode of depression in the previous year, religious involvement was still protective.”

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The data come from the Prevention Needs Assessment (PNA), Utah’s largest school health and risk behavior survey. The PNA survey is conducted every two years in public and charter schools throughout the state to assess health-related behaviors and factors among students in grades 8, 10, and 12.

“Suicide can be difficult to talk about,” said Kimberly Myers, Suicide Prevention Coordinator with the Utah Division of Substance Abuse and Mental Health. “But it doesn’t have to be and you don’t have to do it alone. Everyone plays a role in suicide prevention. Learn the warning signs, reach out to others who are struggling, call the crisis lines, and ultimately, collective efforts in these areas can save a life.”

In 2013, suicide surpassed unintentional injuries to become the leading cause of death among youth ages 10–19 in Utah. On average, 37 youth in Utah die from suicide and 942 are injured in a suicide attempt each year.

The report also identified risk factors for youth suicide ideation, including:

- Students who had been bullied more than once during the previous year (18.6%) were more than four times more likely to have seriously considered suicide.
- Students who had been bullied electronically (15.9%) were four and a half times more likely to have considered suicide. Students who had been bullied both at school and electronically two or more days out of the past year were at an especially high risk; 5.8 times more likely to have considered suicide.
- Students who used video games or computers for non-school-related activities for three or more hours per day (24.8%) were about twice as likely to have seriously considered suicide compared to those who had used electronics two or fewer hours per day.

All suicidal thoughts, behaviors, and attempts should be taken seriously. Get help 24/7 by calling the UNI CrisisLine at 801-587-3000 or the National Suicide Prevention LifeLine at 1-800-273-TALK. Help is also available at www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org.

The report can be downloaded at <http://goo.gl/I7nMS8>. For more information on suicide prevention visit <http://www.health.utah.gov/vipp> or <http://utahsuicideprevention.org/>.

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