Suicide is a leading cause of death for people of all ages, both nationally and in Vermont. For every suicide death, there are many other people who think about or attempt suicide. While its causes vary and are complex, suicide is preventable. Suicide prevention strategies share two goals: to reduce factors that increase risk and to increase factors that promote resilience or coping.

**Protective Factors**

Increasing protective factors and coping skills can help build resilience and improve well-being. Data below show how the presence of protective factors correlates with fewer students making a suicide plan compared to those who made a suicide plan in the past year.

**Youth who have made a suicide plan are less likely to experience protective factors.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Protective Factor</th>
<th>Youth Who Made a Suicide Plan</th>
<th>Youth Without a Suicide Plan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ate dinner at home with at least one parent on 4 days/week</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel they matter to people in their community</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Believe school has clear consequences for behavior</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have 1+ teacher/adult in school they can talk to</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have plan to complete post HS program</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participated in 10+ hours a week in extracurricular activities</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Were physically active at least 60 minutes per day 5 or more days/week</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Vermont Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2019
All protective factors are statistically different for youth who have made a suicide plan compared to those who have not.

**KEY POINTS**

- More than one in ten (13%) of high school students have made a suicide plan in the past year.
- Compared to youth who have not made a suicide plan, youth that have made a suicide plan are significantly less likely to experience protective factors and more likely to experience risk factors.
- Suicide-related thoughts and behaviors can be reduced through promoting protective factors and reducing risk factors.
Risk factors

The presence of warning signs and other risk factors, such as bullying, correlates with students more likely to make a suicide plan. Many of these observations are not sure signs that someone is suicidal but could mean that they are struggling with issues in their lives and could use help. If these issues are not addressed or treated, they can lead to students experiencing suicidal thoughts or attempts.

**Youth who have made a suicide plan are more likely to experience other risk factors.**

![Graph showing comparison between youth who made a suicide plan and those who did not.]

- Felt sad or hopeless for 2 weeks in a row: 84% vs. 23%
- Purposefully hurt themselves without wanting to die, past year: 62% vs. 12%
- Any substance use: 64% vs. 39%
- Went to school under the influence of alcohol or drugs, past year: 33% vs. 12%
- Were bullied, past 30 days: 38% vs. 14%
- Did not go to school because they felt unsafe: 43% vs. 14%
- Were ever forced to have sexual intercourse: 21% vs. 5%
- Experienced dating violence: 8% vs. 5%

Source: Vermont Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2019

All risk factors are statistically different for youth who have made a suicide plan compared to those who have not. Any substance use includes alcohol, marijuana, or tobacco use.

Key Takeaways

Suicide-related thoughts and behaviors can be addressed through promoting protective factors and reducing risk factors. In addition, educating youths on depression and suicidal behavior has been shown to prevent suicidal behavior. For more information on suicide risk factors and signs someone may be struggling, visit the Vermont Department of Health’s prevent teen suicide webpage here.

For more information about these data: Caitlin Quinn, Caitlin.Quinn@vermont.gov

References

1. CDC Fatal Injury and Violence Data, 2020
3. CDC Suicide Webpage