



**BEHAVIORAL HEALTH and
RECOVERY SERVICES (BHRS)
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PRESS RELEASE: For Immediate Release
September 4, 2020

September is Suicide Prevention Month

MERCED COUNTY, CA---The Merced County Board of Supervisors in conjunction with Merced County's Behavioral Health and Recovery Services (BHRS) wants to remind everyone that September is National Suicide Prevention Month.

The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) reports that suicide is the 10th leading cause of death in the U.S., the third leading cause of death for people aged 10–14, and the second leading cause of death for individuals aged 15–24. According to the CDC, suicide rates have increased by 30 percent since 1999.

“As an LMFT, sister, auntie, daughter, friend, community leader, I find these statistics deeply troubling and heart breaking. Research shows people who are having thoughts of suicide actually experience hope and relief when someone asks about their day or smiles at them. We can help prevent suicide by simply acknowledging a stranger, checking in on a friend or colleague, and reminding the people we care about that we love them. Simple acts of kindness go a long way and might save a life,” said Genevieve G. Valentine, Director of Behavioral Health and Recovery Services.

On any given day being aware of suicide warning signs and risk factors is important. However, COVID-19 has put additional stress and anxiety on people and revisiting these tips are more vital than ever.

Below are a few Suicide Prevention Warning Signs, Risk Factors, and Helpful Tips:

Warning Signs:

- Increased alcohol and drug use
- Aggressive behavior
- Withdrawal from friends, family and community
- Dramatic mood swings
- Impulsive or reckless behavior
- Collecting and saving pills or buying a weapon
- Giving away possessions
- Tying up loose ends, like organizing personal papers or paying off debts
- Saying goodbye to friends and family

Risk Factors:

- A family history of suicide
- Substance use. Drugs can create mental highs and lows that worsen suicidal thoughts.
- Intoxication. More than 1 in 3 people who die from suicide are under the influence of alcohol at the time of death.
- Access to firearms
- A serious or chronic medical illness (Research has found that 46 percent of people who die by suicide had a known mental health condition.)
- Gender. Although more women than men attempt suicide, men are nearly 4x more likely to die by suicide.
- A history of trauma or abuse
- Prolonged stress
- A recent tragedy or loss

Helpful Tips on how to approach a suicide-crisis:

- Talk openly and honestly. Don't be afraid to ask questions like: "Do you have a plan for how you would kill yourself?"
- Remove means such as guns, knives or stockpiled pills
- Calmly ask simple and direct questions, like "Can I help you call your psychiatrist?"
- If there are multiple people around, have one person speak at a time
- Express support and concern
- Don't argue, threaten or raise your voice
- Don't debate whether suicide is right or wrong
- If you're nervous, try not to fidget or pace
- Be patient

"If you, a friend or family member is struggling with suicidal ideation, there is HELP. BHRS understands. We are here to listen, provide support, improve the mental wellness and resiliency of EVERYONE in our community," said Sharon Jones, BHRS MHSA Coordinator and Ethnic Services Manager.

If you need support, community resources, or just someone to talk to, **we are here for you.**

Please feel free to reach out (via email or phone) to BHRS:

Toll Free: (888) 334-0163

TDD/TTY: (866) 293-1818

Staff is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

Email: bhrs@countyofmerced.com

Remember suicidal thoughts are a symptom, just like any other — they can be treated.