Youth Suicide

A summary of the scientific literature on the strength of evidence behind prevention strategies for youth suicide.



How This Impacts Children's Development

Youth suicide is not only a tragic event, but also has significant and lasting impacts on families, schools, and communities. It has been the second leading cause of death among adolescents, with rates increasing by 80% in the United States over the previous decade. Prevention programs are crucial for supporting adolescents who experience suicidal thoughts or attempts.

Read the brief: Preventing Adolescent Suicide: Recommendations for Policymakers, Practitioners, Program Developers, and Researchers, 2023

Read the brief: Access to Firearms Increases Child and Adolescent Suicide, 2020

Talking Points from the SRCD Briefs

- COVID-19 exacerbated the rise in suicides and attempts, but the rising trend began before the pandemic.
    - To illustrate the rapid increase, one in five adolescents (20%) reported seriously considering suicide in 2021, whereas one in ten (10%) reported attempting suicide in the previous year.
- In the U.S., about 40% of suicide fatalities involved firearms.
    - Suicide rates among children and adolescents who live in homes with guns are four times higher.
- Racial and ethnic minority youth are experiencing higher rates of suicide compared to the general youth population, with Black youth having rates of suicidal thoughts and attempts comparable to those of White adolescents.
- The highest risk groups include:
    - For suicide fatalities, youth who are: indigenous, boys, and live in rural communities.
    - For suicidal thoughts and attempts, youth who are: indigenous, multiracial, girls, and LGBTQ+ adolescents, particularly bisexual and transgender adolescents.

Policy Considerations in the Briefs

- Strong evidence indicates that the following measures can reduce youth suicide: restricting access to lethal means (such as firearms, building and bridge protections, and medication overdose safeguards), implementing LGBTQ+ affirming policies, screening for suicide risk in medical settings, and making

community-wide investments through the Garrett Lee Smith Memorial Act, which funds grants to enhance service access, conduct assessments, raise awareness, and reduce stigma.
- Programs and research should focus on minoritized youth (e.g. racial/ethnic minority and LGBTQ+ youth), who are at a higher suicide risk.
- Pediatricians and emergency department clinicians could provide counseling about firearm safety to parents.
- Lawmakers could enact legislation, such as Child Access Prevention (CAP) laws that impose penalties on adults if a child could gain access to their guns, especially if access results in a fatal or non-fatal injury.

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