



# RECOGNIZING SUICIDE RISK

in College Students

## What is Depression?

**Depression is a condition that affects people of all ages, races, genders and sexual orientations.**

When someone is depressed, he or she typically feels sadness that lasts longer than a few days or weeks. Depression has genetic components, and a predisposition toward depression can be passed from one generation to the next. It can also be triggered by stress or other life events or a combination of factors. However, depression is a treatable condition. Serious depression is a leading risk factor for suicide, which is the third leading cause of death among college-aged students ranging from 18 to 24 years old. This brochure is intended to provide information to help you better understand depression and know how and when to seek help for someone you know who is experiencing depression and who may be suicidal.

## What Does Depression Look Like?

Recognizing depression is a critical first step in getting yourself or someone else the help needed. It is important to keep in mind that people experiencing depression may not know how to ask for help, so understanding what to look for is important.

### Signs of depression among college students

- Sadness and crying
- Poor academic performance
- Homesickness
- Irritability
- Conflicts with roommates, friends or peers
- Change in sleep pattern and/or appetite
- Increased use of alcohol and/or other drugs
- Withdrawal from family, friends and activities once enjoyed

## Common Concerns Among College Students Who Experience Depression

- Academic problems: missing classes, not completing assignments, inattentiveness, and/or failing exams and courses.
- Relationship problems: conflicts with roommates, parents, friends and/or partners, feelings of social isolation.
- Engaging in risky behaviors: violence, unprotected sexual practices, alcohol and other drug abuse, and/or driving under the influence.



## Understanding Suicide Risk

**Factors that may contribute to suicide risk**

- Family history of depression/suicide
- History of physical or sexual abuse
- Access to firearms or other lethal methods
- Having made a previous suicide attempt or having had previous suicidal thoughts

## Know the Warning Signs of Suicide Risk

Although individuals may vary in how they respond to suicidal thoughts, there are common warning signs that may suggest an individual is considering suicide. In particular, it is important to notice and follow up when someone you know is acting out of character.

### Warning signs to take seriously include the following behaviors

- Reports feeling very depressed
- Talks about wanting to commit suicide
- Is focused on death and dying
- Writes poems, letters, drawings or stories about death and/or suicide
- Starts giving away possessions
- Experiences feelings of hopelessness and helplessness
- Prepares for death by making out a will
- Says things like, "I don't deserve to be here," "I wish I were dead," "I am going to kill myself," or "I want to die"
- Engages in reckless behaviors
- Has experienced a recent loss (e.g., death or break-up)
- Displays impulsive or aggressive tendencies

## Protective Factors That Lower Suicide Risk

- Social connections
- Family relationships (e.g., positive support from parents)
- Romantic relationships
- Friendships
- Sense of belonging (e.g., part of a college community)
- Spirituality (meditation, yoga, prayer)
- Exercise or sports
- Setting and pursuing goals
- Pets
- Hobbies (e.g., music, art)
- Religion
- Future personal and academic goals
- Strong sense of cultural identity
- Fear of death



## You Can Help

First and foremost, take suicide seriously. It is always better to overreact than underreact. Additionally, here are some other things you can do when someone you know is thinking about suicide:

- Seek support from others. Do not allow yourself to be sworn to secrecy.
- Listen and accept the other person's feelings. Try not to judge or argue.
- Be direct and listen. Don't act shocked by his/her plans.
- Never dare someone to kill him or herself.
- Offer to go with the person to seek help from a counselor or other source of support.
- If possible, do not leave the person alone. If you are unable to stay with the person, call on others (Residence Life staff, etc.) to assist.
- Take QPR (Question, Persuade, Refer) training. Email [lifeline@lawrence.edu](mailto:lifeline@lawrence.edu) to indicate an interest in signing up for QPR training.



## Find Someone Else Who Can Help

- Counseling Services (1-920-832-6574)
- Residence Hall Directors (RHDs) On-duty RHD (1-920-419-6596)
- Residence Life Advisors (RLAs)
- Campus Security (1-920-832-6999)
- Family or friends
- A religious or spiritual advisor
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (1-800-273-TALK)
- Outagamie County Crisis Intervention (1-920-832-4646)
- In case of emergency, call 911



## What is Counseling?

Counseling is a process that helps people resolve personal, academic, social, or vocational problems. Counseling Services at Lawrence University assists students in making the best possible decisions and provides them with support. As an active, collaborative effort, a student and a counselor can work together to clarify issues and concerns, set goals, and explore possible courses of action. Through this process, students become more self-aware, independent, and effective at pursuing their personal goals. Sometimes personal problems get in the way of academics, and speaking to a counselor during a difficult time can help students bring their focus back to their studies.

Counseling services are free of charge to current students. Services are confidential, and Lawrence's policy on confidentiality is in accordance with the ethical standards of the American Psychological Association and the American Counseling Association.



### Suicide Prevention for African-American College Students

For decades, African-Americans have had some of the lowest rates of suicide in the country. Because of this, many individuals in the African-American community mistakenly believe that suicide is not a problem for this population and are unaware that rates of suicide for African-Americans are on the rise. African-American college-age men, in particular, have shown a significant increase in suicide, with rates more than doubling in recent years.

#### **Risk factors for suicide within the African-American community**

- A history of being abused
- Discrimination
- Social isolation, particularly from family or one's spiritual community
- Unwillingness to seek help because of stigma in using mental health services
- Questioning one's sexuality

### Suicide Prevention for Asian-American College Students

Suicide rates of Asian-American college-age students are among the highest of their peers, underlining the need for suicide awareness, outreach, and prevention efforts within the Asian-American community. Often, Asian-American college students feel ashamed if they are experiencing emotional or interpersonal problems. Consequently, they may feel embarrassed about seeking mental health services. For Asian-American students, the absence of interpersonal attachments, feelings of worthlessness, and a sense of hopelessness have been correlated with thoughts of suicide.

#### **Risk factors for suicide within the Asian-American community**

- Conflicts with parents or being rejected by them
- Feelings of alienation, loneliness, guilt, shame or inadequacy
- Traditional Asian values in conflict with other cultures
- A coping style in which problems are kept inside, unexpressed
- Discrimination
- Questioning one's sexuality

### Suicide Prevention for Latino College Students

Recent statistics indicate that Latino college-aged individuals are at a higher risk for attempting suicide than individuals from many other ethnic groups. Latina college-aged women report some of the highest rates of depression, and Latino men under 25 are at an increased risk for committing suicide. Among Latino groups, research shows that Puerto Ricans, in particular, have disproportionately high rates of suicide.

Latinas are at a higher risk for attempting suicide than individuals from many other ethnic groups, and are twice as likely to commit suicide as Latinos. This underlines the need for suicide awareness, outreach and prevention efforts within the Latin community.

#### **Risk factors for suicide within the Latino community**

- Conflicts within family, particularly problems communicating with parents
- Isolation from spiritual community
- Questioning one's sexuality
- Impulsivity
- Discrimination
- Difficulty with acculturation
- Generational conflicts

### Family Factors

It's important to consider the central role of family in the Latino community. For adolescent Latinas, there can be a strong clash between *familismo*—strong identification with the nuclear and extended family—and a young woman's desire for autonomy. Entering college, choosing a major, and contemplating a career outside of the home may go against this set of cultural beliefs. Conflicts may be worsened by cultural expectations that limit freedom of choice, expression in activities outside of classes, or choices regarding romantic partners. Some may feel guilty or disloyal by discussing family issues with others.

### Suicide Prevention for Native American College Students

Suicide is the second leading cause of death for Native American college students ages 15–24. This underlines the need for suicide awareness, outreach, and prevention efforts within the Native American community. Native Americans are less likely to tell others they are thinking about suicide. If Native American students (ages 15–24) disclose intent of suicide, they are more likely to confide in other people. It should be noted that there are different suicidal factors for different tribal regions.

#### **Risk factors for suicide within the Native American community**

- Having experienced cultural trauma and discrimination (e.g., forced removal from lands)
- A history of substance abuse
- Participation in a gang
- Failed ability in adolescence to make identity-preserving linkages between the past, present and future
- Racism
- Lower socioeconomic status

### Suicide Prevention for International Students

Along with the stresses many college students face, international students often experience additional pressures. Experiences such as acclimating to a new culture, using a foreign language, adjusting to the subtleties of interactions, and feeling misunderstood may contribute to a heightened level of stress and feelings of depression.

Many people around the world are hesitant to seek mental health counseling because it is perceived as a failing. International students from such cultures may be reluctant to seek help and may instead withdraw and thereby increase their risk of suicide.

#### **Risk factors for suicide within the international student community**

- Homesickness and struggles with cultural adjustment
- Experiences with prejudice
- Feeling misunderstood (e.g., cultural differences, language barriers)
- Unwillingness to seek mental health services
- Family pressure to succeed and pursue specific careers

### Suicide Prevention for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender College Students

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) college students are one of the groups at highest risk for suicide; they are at two to three times greater risk of attempting suicide than their heterosexual peers. Research with the gay/bisexually identified male college-aged population showed that close to one quarter of those surveyed had attempted suicide at least once. One study of LGBT college students found that lesbian/bisexually identified college students were 3.7 times more likely to consider suicide than their heterosexual peers. In addition, transgender people attempt suicide at a rate more than 25 times the national average.

#### **Risk factors for suicide within the LGBT community**

- Experiences of verbal and physical harassment
- Lack of family support and acceptance of their sexuality
- Stigmatization and discrimination based on one's sexuality or gender identity

### Suicide Prevention for College Students with Disabilities

Students with physical disabilities make up approximately 5 percent of the college population, yet their specific risk factors are often overlooked. Similar to other students during their college years, students with physical disabilities are learning to become increasingly self-sufficient. Living without the presence of caretakers may become overwhelming, thus putting some students at increased risk for depression and suicide. The severity and visibility of a disability, as well as whether the disability is recently acquired, may contribute to depression and possibly suicide. Students with learning and/or emotional disabilities may also be at increased risk for suicide. Research has shown that a disabled person's risk for suicide is higher if the disability is less visible.

#### **Risk factors for suicide within the disabled community**

- Denial of the disability
- Persistent beliefs of achieving full health and/or ability
- An inability to integrate the disability into one's identity
- Impulsive or aggressive tendencies
- Isolation and lack of knowledge regarding support for the disability

**LU Counseling Services**[www.lawrence.edu/dept/student\\_dean/counseling](http://www.lawrence.edu/dept/student_dean/counseling)**f** Become a friend of Lawrence University Counseling Services on Facebook

920-832-6574

Please call between 7:30 a.m.–noon or 1–4:30 p.m. Monday–Friday for more information or to set up an appointment.

LU Counseling Services is located on the second floor of the Buchanan Kiewit Wellness Center.

**LU Health Services**[www.lawrence.edu/dept/student\\_dean/health](http://www.lawrence.edu/dept/student_dean/health)

920-832-6574

The Landis Health Center is located on the second floor of the Buchanan-Kiewit Wellness Center.

Academic year hours: 7:30 a.m.–noon. and 1–4:30 p.m., Monday–Friday; closed every Wednesday from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. for staff meeting.  
Physician hours: 8–8:45 a.m. Monday–Friday.**LU Lifeline**[www.lawrence.edu/lifeline](http://www.lawrence.edu/lifeline)

The Lawrence Lifeline Project is a comprehensive approach to lowering suicide risk factors and enhancing protective factors, including life skills and social networking, among Lawrence students.

**Online Mental Health Screening (free and confidential)**[www.mentalhealthscreening.org/screening/?keyword=VIKINGS](http://www.mentalhealthscreening.org/screening/?keyword=VIKINGS)**Buchanan Kiewit Wellness Center**[www.lawrence.edu/athletics/recreation](http://www.lawrence.edu/athletics/recreation)

The Buchanan Kiewit Wellness Center recognizes the importance, benefits, and rewards of choosing a healthy lifestyle. Buchanan Kiewit staff is committed to serving our diverse campus community by providing quality experiences that contribute to individuals' total well-being, and we strive to exceed the needs of an ever-changing student population.

**Activities calendar:**[www.lawrence.edu/athletics/recreation/calendar/calendar.htm](http://www.lawrence.edu/athletics/recreation/calendar/calendar.htm)**WELLU**[www.lawrence.edu/committee/wellness](http://www.lawrence.edu/committee/wellness)**f** Check out the WELLU Facebook page: [www.facebook.com/luwellness](http://www.facebook.com/luwellness)Not a Facebook fan? Join the WELLU Connection email listserv by emailing [patty.leiker@lawrence.edu](mailto:patty.leiker@lawrence.edu).**Student Health 101**[www.readsh101.com/lawrence.html](http://www.readsh101.com/lawrence.html)

Student Health 101 is an online magazine designed to give students a comprehensive resource to enhance their own overall wellness efforts. The publication is delivered directly to each student's inbox nine times a year during the first week of each month. A Lawrence student serves as an on-campus correspondent and helps personalize the magazine's content to the college. Additionally, students can enter to win \$1,000 each month just by reading and answering a few questions about what they enjoyed about that month's issue.



[www.lawrence.edu/lifeline](http://www.lawrence.edu/lifeline)

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