School Campus Safety NEWS

Report: Middle School Suicide Rates More Than Doubled Since 2007

By Amy Brennan, Campus Safety Web Editor - Article and image originally appeared on www.CampusSafetyMagazine.com; reprinted with permission from the author

Recent statistics have shown a disturbing rise in suicide among middle school students in America. From 2007 to 2014, suicide rates have doubled among children ages 10 to 14, according to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The annual rate skyrocketed from 0.9 suicides per 100,000 middle schoolers in 2007 to 2.1 suicides per 100,000 middle schoolers in 2014.

Suicides have now surpassed the death rate from car crashes in that age group for the first time, according to NorthJersey.com.

Experts say the factors leading to this alarming increase include academic pressure, economic uncertainty, fear of terrorism, and social media.

Maurice Elias, a psychologist at Rutgers University and director of the school’s Social-Emotional Learning Lab, says young people become overwhelmed easily because they have not yet developed the coping skills that adults have.

“Middle school is a very difficult time,” she said. “They are very sensitive to criticism. So they are particularly prone to suicidal ideation and even action. A lot of times they exaggerate the situation. If it’s a little thing, they think it’s a huge thing. If someone doesn’t like them, they think that nobody will like them forever.”

Suicide and Social Media

The most concerning factor to many researchers is social media, which has become a playground for cyber bullying among a susceptible age group.

Most recently, a “game” called the Blue Whale Challenge has been circling the internet and is thought to be the cause of several deaths across the globe.

The game has users complete daily tasks ranging from watching scary movies to self-mutilation. On the fiftieth day, the user is allegedly told to kill themselves.

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October - A Busy Month for School Safety

By Laura Black, Illinois School and Campus Safety Program Coordinator

October. It conjures images of Fall leaves, apple cider, black cats, and those first nips from frost. But, for those of in the field of school and campus safety, October also equals three very important events: National Safe Schools Week, National School Bus Safety Week, and National Bullying Prevention Month.

For last year’s National Safe Schools Week we focused on the FEMA’s Ready Kids campaign, including the Be A Hero curriculum. This year, National Safe Schools Week runs October 15th-21st and, in looking at broad spectrum resources for school safety, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Safe Youth, Safe Schools webpage has an abundance of resources available. Topics on the webpage range from getting to school safely and school violence to school health indexes and playground injuries.

October 16th-20th is National School Bus Safety Week. Each October the National Association for Pupil Transportation urges schools around the country to get involved in promoting school bus safety. This year’s theme is “#STOP ON RED!” and the 2018 theme is “My Driver - My Safety Hero!”

Lastly, October is National Bullying Prevention Month (NBPM), which began in 2006. The goals of NBPM include bringing awareness to the problem and providing resources to help schools address it. For more information on NBPM and for ideas to help prevent bullying, visit the National Bullying Prevention Center, youth.gov, stopbullying.gov, and Stomp Out Bullying.
Take Part in the Seat Belts Save Challenge

By Laura Black, Illinois School and Campus Safety Program Coordinator

Every semester Driver’s Ed instructors prepare teens for the responsibility of driving, but there are additional steps that can be taken to help ensure the safety of students once they or their friends have obtained licenses. One of those steps is taking part in The National Organizations for Youth Safety (NOYS) annual Seat Belts Save Challenge, which encourages young drivers and passengers to wear their seat belts.

According to NOYS, when it comes to seat belt usage, of the “young drivers who died in crashes, only 54% were restrained at the time of the crash. And, of teens that died in passenger vehicle crashes, over half (56%) were not wearing a seat belt at the time of the crash.” Additionally, NOYS notes that seatbelt usage can reduce the number of deaths and serious injuries by nearly a half.

For those interested in participating, the challenge has schools conduct an unannounced seat belt check of students, create and implement an education campaign, and then complete another unannounced seat belt check. The results are reported to NOYS.

Using the Seat Belts Save Challenge to promote safety not only helps prevent unnecessary injuries, the challenge also provides participating schools the chance to win up to $1,500, among other prizes. Registration for the Fall 2017 Seat Belts Save Challenge is under way and runs through October 15.

Need Training for Your School, District, Campus, or Department?

The Illinois School and Campus Safety Program offers a variety of free courses and training upon request. To learn more about the courses available, to view scheduled courses, and to request a course for your area, visit the Ready Illinois website at ready.illinois.gov and view the Schools/Campus page under the Plan and Prepare tab. For additional questions regarding the Illinois School and Campus Safety Program contact schoolsafety@iletsbei.com.
Having returned to campuses across the state in the last few weeks, it is critical that students receive pertinent safety information. Although there are many safety concerns, the following provides information on National Campus Safety Awareness Month, student mental health, and fire safety concerns important to physical health.

**National Campus Safety Awareness Month 2017**

September was National Campus Safety Awareness Month and this year’s theme was “Moving Forward Together.” In order to promote the various facets of campus safety, the Clery Center hosted a series of webinars including: First Step: Understanding the Basics, First Step: Training Campus Safety Professionals, and First Step: Effective Prevention Practices to Transform Your Campus Safety Efforts. Although National Campus Safety Awareness Month has passed, this important information is still available on the website.

**Mental Health**

For many students, college is their first taste of adulthood. They have graduated from school, said goodbye to those they grew up with, and may be spending extended time away from their families for the first time in their lives. College, however, isn’t always sunshine and roses. College can be stressful. Students can feel overwhelmed and don’t necessarily know where to turn for help. Students may feel isolated and lonely being away from family and friends.

And, according to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), “one in five young adults will experience a mental health condition during college.” In order to help address mental illness in college, NAMI provides many resources, including YouTube videos, social media resources, and the guide Starting the Conversation: College and Your Mental Health. The Jed Foundation also offers resources for teens and young adults including JED Campus, ULifeline, and Half of Us.

**Fire Safety**

When it comes to setting up a dorm room or apartment there is more to keep in mind than looks and feng shui; students need to make sure they have set up their living space safely. According to the Center for Campus Fire Safety, some common fire hazards to watch out for include lighting and placing candles, incense, or other materials in close proximity to flammable items; overloading outlets; having tapestries, curtains, or other wall hangings in contact with lights or heating devices; leaving cooking food unattended; and keeping electrical items away from sinks and tubs.

It is also important that students understand the danger of pranks involving fire or incendiary items. Ten years ago this August, a prank caused the tragic death of Sheridan “Danny” Dahlquist, a Bradley University soccer player. Dahlquist died when his roommates accidently set his bedroom on fire while he was sleeping during a prank involving roman candles.

To help prevent fire-related tragedies, consider disseminating fire safety information to students and faculty alike, including resources provided by the U.S Fire Administration website, Campus Firewatch, and the Center for Campus Fire Safety.
The Illinois School and Campus Safety Program provides awareness and preparedness training to enhance organizational capacity to plan for, respond to, and recover from an emergency or disaster. Contact schoolsafety@iletsbei.com for a digital copy of our brochure.

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One Texas family found their 15-year-old son, Isaiah Gonzalez, hanging in his bedroom. He had streamed his death on the web. The family believes he was participating in the Blue Whale Challenge, reports The Washington Post.

His father, Jorge, said his son was sending friends pictures of the completed tasks.

“They blew it off like it was a joke and if one of them would have said something, one of them would have called us, he would have been alive,” said Isaiah’s sister, Scarlett.

Additional Suicide Statistics

Middle schoolers aren’t the only age group that is seeing an increase in suicide rates.

From 1999 to 2014, suicide rates among these age groups have increased as follows:

- 53 percent increase among ages 15 to 24, averaging to 4.6 suicides per 100,000 in 2014
- 31 percent increase among ages 25 to 44, averaging to 7.2 suicides per 100,000 in 2014
- 63 percent increase among ages 45 to 64, averaging to 9.8 suicides per 100,000 in 2014
- 43 percent increase among ages 65 to 74, averaging to 5.9 suicides per 100,000 in 2014

The suicide rate among ages 75 and over has decreased by 11 percent.

What We Can Do

To halt the increase in suicide among young people, experts urge parents and teachers to educate themselves on the warning signs of suicide.

Some of those warning signs include giving away belongings, loss of appetite, increase use of drugs or alcohol, sleep loss, loss of interest in former hobbies, personality changes and feeling trapped or hopeless.

Clark Flatt, a man who lost his 16-year-old son to suicide 20 years ago, started a foundation to help educate both teachers and teens about suicide. The Jason Foundation, named after his late son, has led to the passing of the Jason Flatt Act. The act requires suicide prevention as part of teacher training and has been adopted by 19 states.

Flatt believes that addressing bullying doesn’t only help teachers and those who are targeted but also helps those who are doing the bullying.

“We’re not dealing with a bunch of little Hannibal Lecters,” he said. “That behavior can change. If not, they grow up with problems when dealing with the workplace where bullying isn’t tolerated.”

For more articles by Amy Brennan and for campus safety information, visit www.CampusSafetyMagazine.com