



Every Life Counts



A Suicide Prevention Toolkit by the Blue Dove Foundation

RESOURCES FOR CHILDREN AND TEENAGERS



HOW CAN THE BLUE DOVE FOUNDATION HELP?

The Blue Dove Foundation was created to help address the issues of mental illness and addiction in the Jewish community and beyond. We work with individuals and organizations across the United States and around the world. Each of us at Blue Dove has been personally touched by these challenges, and we are dedicated to helping our communities learn, teach, speak, think, and act on these life challenges in ways that decrease stigma and increase understanding.

As we continue to educate, equip, and ignite our Jewish community with tools to understand, support, and overcome the challenges presented by mental illness and substance use disorder, we are finding many ways to fill in the mental health education gaps in the Jewish community. We have created several resources connecting Judaism and Jewish Holidays to mental health and substance use disorders, and we have workshops that help people learn and grow in their awareness.

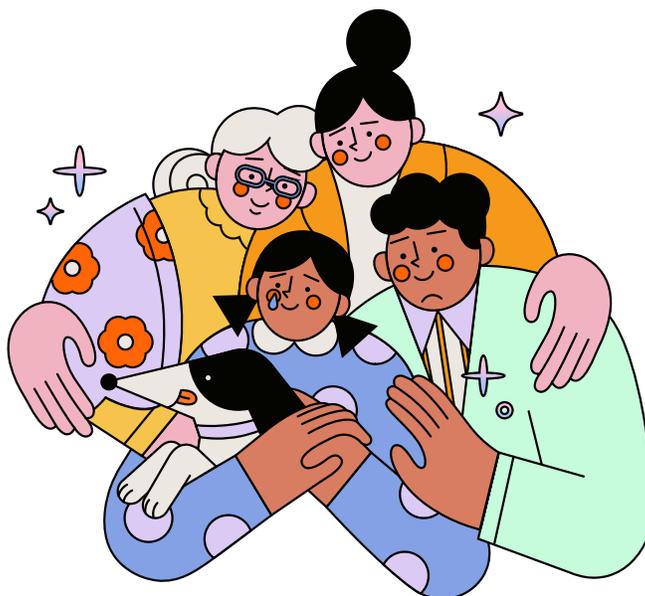
Resources you can find on our website include:

- **[Every Life Counts](#)**: Short, accessible information to answer questions about suicide, including how to talk with children about it, how to help a family member who is struggling, Jewish practices during burial and grief, and prayers and rituals for survivors of suicide.
- **[Personal stories](#)**
 - Our #QuietingTheSilence book shares personal stories of struggles and loss.
- **[Resources](#)** and **[Jewish Mental Wellness Toolkit](#)**
 - Our Resource Library and Jewish Mental Wellness Toolkit offers hope and support to inspire learning and reduce stigma.
- **[Prayers for Healing](#)**
 - Mi Sheberach for Mental Health: A collection of prayers for healing.
- **[Workshops](#)** and **[events](#)** for communities across the United States and in other countries relating to mental health and Jewish values and ritual.

TALKING ABOUT MENTAL ILLNESS AND MENTAL WELLNESS WITH CHILDREN AND TEENS

Parents and educators should be able to talk with children and teens about mental health and well-being in the same open and honest way we talk about physical health and well-being. We don't want our youth to be afraid or feel shame about mental illness. Just like we take care of ourselves and each other when we have a cold, we need to take care of ourselves and each other when we have a worry. And just like some physical illnesses require more intensive medical care, so do some mental illnesses. We can help our children recognize the range of their normal emotions and thoughts, including worried feelings and thoughts, sad feelings and thoughts, overwhelmed feelings and thoughts, etc., while teaching and modeling the tools for emotional regulation. And when someone feels worried or sad or overwhelmed all or most of the time, they need to know it's OK to seek help from medical or mental health professionals.

Children and teens are not insulated from news or conversations about mental health and mental illness. **When children know something is wrong but don't have information to make sense of it, they fill in their own explanations, which are often scarier than the truth and are not always based in fact.** That doesn't mean we need to tell children every detail when a loved one is experiencing a mental health crisis, but we do need to answer their questions and provide them with developmental and age-appropriate information they need to make sense of the situation.



TALKING ABOUT MENTAL ILLNESS AND MENTAL WELLNESS WITH CHILDREN AND TEENS

We can use physical health as a model for how we talk to children about mental well-being and mental illness:



Physical health: Children often hear about their medical problems. They understand that if they have asthma, their lungs and airways tighten up in response to dust, pets, cold or exercise. They know the wheezing makes them uncomfortable, so they need to take medications for relief and avoid situations that may trigger an attack.

Mental health: Similarly, you can let your child know mental health concerns like anxiety, depression, ADHD and OCD, among others, are also physical conditions that start with their brain. The brain controls feelings, thoughts and behavior – like the “central headquarters” of the body. Sometimes the brain gets “knocked off balance,” but, like other medical problems, they can learn to manage this with treatment, which can include medications and behavioral support such as stress reduction, relaxation and psychotherapies.

Some illnesses are more serious than others, and children may have questions when we are talking about a potentially fatal diagnosis, illnesses or death. Historically, there has been a lot of shame and stigma around suicide. But we now know that when someone is struggling with mental health, it is not unusual to have some thoughts of suicide.

If you are telling your child someone they know and love is struggling with a mental health condition, take into account their age as well as the context of the information. **Think ahead about the questions they may have and how you can answer them. Be honest without being graphic.** You might consult with a therapist or social worker before telling your child sensitive information. Consider the trusted adults a child can talk to if they have questions.

TALKING ABOUT MENTAL ILLNESS AND MENTAL WELLNESS WITH CHILDREN AND TEENS

Additional tips for talking to children about mental health and illness:

- Use language children understand, such as “helpful” or “unhelpful” thoughts and “safe” or “unsafe” behaviors.
- Model an ability to talk about mental wellness and illness without stigmatizing them. If you have family meetings, consider adding a regular check-in about mental and physical well-being.
- Recognize and normalize the spectrum of mental health challenges. If a child only hears the word “depression” in the context of a death by suicide or “mental illness” when discussing people who are unhoused, for example, the child will equate the outcome of depression with death and mental illness with homelessness. If the child knows depression is usually treatable and many people live with mental illnesses, including people they know, the language and concept of mental illness will not feel as scary.
- Normalize the range of emotions we all experience, and discuss ways to manage them. It helps when children recognize fear, boredom, frustration and sadness as healthy, normal feelings that help us navigate the world and our own actions.
- Discuss with your child the rituals or practices that add to your mental well-being, and help them develop their own, e.g., taking walks/exercising, taking a shower or bath, working on art, spending time with friends and family, singing or listening to music, engaging in hobbies, cooking, going to community gatherings, meditating, participating in prayer or other religious practice, practicing bedtime rituals, eating healthfully and following sleeping routines.

Learn more about mental health terminology in our [Mental Health Glossary](#). Also see [How do we talk about suicide and suicidal ideation](#).



HOW DO WE TALK TO CHILDREN AND TEENS ABOUT SUICIDE?

Talking about a death by suicide is difficult, but we have some helpful guidelines you can follow. Grief experts recommend being honest, using child-appropriate language, only telling children the basics and letting their questions guide the rest of the conversation. *The Dougy Center, a grief support center in Oregon, provides this [helpful resource](#).*

When talking about a suicide death, we now avoid the term “committed suicide.” It is a common, and harmful, idea that those who die by suicide “commit” something wrong – a crime, a sin, etc. This blame only furthers stigma or shame. Instead, we use terms such as “suicide attempt,” “suicide survivor,” or “died by suicide.” We can also say someone is “living with suicidal thoughts/ideation.” **By changing the way we speak about it, we can begin to eliminate the stigma and criminalization of suicidal thoughts and behaviors.**

When talking with children about suicide or the mental illness that may have contributed to a loved one’s death by suicide, it helps to get guidance on the most appropriate language for the age of the child.

In a podcast episode of *This American Life*, grief counselors at a center called *The Sharing Place* discuss the language they use when speaking with children after a family member dies by suicide:



“There’s a sickness in your brain called depression...and it can make you decide to make your own body stop working.”

(Listen to the full conversation)

Jewish rituals for those who have died and those who are mourning can be especially helpful to share with children. These rituals provide structure, language, comfort and community at a time of loss. ([See What are the Jewish Mourning Practices for a Suicide?](#)) We can experience our grief and our sadness while also feeling gratitude for the community, friends and practices that make it easier to get through hard times.

HOW DO WE TALK TO CHILDREN AND TEENS ABOUT SUICIDE?

For teens: Four helpful resources for discussing mental health challenges and behaviors associated with them.

1 *I had a black dog, his name was depression (Video)*



This video is used by many practitioners to open up a discussion about depression with teens. Questions for discussion:

- What stuck out for you about the video?
- Can you relate to any aspects of this metaphor about depression, or did you notice whether a loved one can?

- Was there anything that surprised you in the video?
- What questions do you have after watching it?

LEARN MORE



2 *Youth Mental Health First Aid*



This is a course that teens can take to learn about mental health and how to respond when they or their peers are struggling. Youth learn and practice these five skills:

- Assess for risk of suicide or harm
- Listen nonjudgmentally

- Give reassurance and information
- Encourage appropriate professional help
- Encourage self-help and other support strategies

LEARN MORE



HOW DO WE TALK TO CHILDREN AND TEENS ABOUT SUICIDE?

3 Learn more about self-harm or nonsuicidal injury



It is not uncommon for teens who are struggling to engage in self-harm. [This resource](#) explores the reasons for this behavior and the best ways to seek support.



4 Ladder of Emotional Regulation

The resource is divided into four sections:

- Page 1: Introduction** - Explains that everyone has emotions and provides an overview of the ladder.
- Page 2: Strategies** - Lists 8 strategies for emotional regulation, such as 'I feel distress' and 'I breathe distress'.
- Page 3: The Ladder** - A detailed diagram of the 'Ladder of Emotional Regulation' with 8 rungs, each corresponding to a strategy.
- Page 4: Summary** - Reinforces the key points and provides contact information.

This resource helps identify the many ways we can help regulate and calm ourselves when we feel a range of emotions, from being overwhelmed, to agitated, upset or in distress.



SUPPORTING CHILDREN THROUGH A FAMILY MEMBER'S DEATH BY SUICIDE



A candid conversation between two moms whose husbands died by suicide. They discuss how they supported their children through the grief, what helped and what didn't, including Jewish rituals and supports.

Jennifer's bio: Jennifer Greenberg is a highly motivated media professional with 18 years of experience in buying and planning broadcast, digital, out-of-home, social, mobile and direct-response media. She has a strong passion for cultivating client and partner relationships and finding innovative media solutions to achieve business and communication goals. Jennifer's husband died by suicide in 2016.

Kaiya's bio: Kaiya Goldhammer is an early childhood educator in the Foundation School of Congregation Neveh Shalom in Portland, Ore., where she and her two children are members. She has training in the Nurtured Heart approach to working with children, and in her spare time she enjoys reading, hiking and writing. Kaiya's husband died by suicide in 2020.

JEWISH SOURCES ON MENTAL HEALTH AND THE VALUE OF LIFE

These sources can be used as text studies or conversation starters for youth about Judaism and mental health.



ואהבת לרעך כמוך אני יהוה
*And you shall love your neighbor
as yourself; I am God. (Leviticus 19:18)*



Some of us need to remember to show kindness to others in the same way we ourselves want to be treated; others of us need reminding to treat ourselves as well as we'd treat a dear friend. *Which are you? What helps you remember to treat others – or yourself – kindly? What are the barriers for you doing that?*



החיים והמוֹת נתתי לפניך הברכה והקללה
ובחרת בחיים למען תחיה אתה וזרעך
I have put before you life and death, blessing
and curse; choose life so that you and
your offspring will live. (Deuteronomy 30:19)



It may seem obvious that in a choice between life and death, God would want us to choose life. *Why do you think the Torah reminds us to choose life? Do you think we ever have a choice between blessing and curse? How have you chosen life, death, curse or blessing in your experience? What would you tell a friend who was struggling to “choose life”?*



JEWISH SOURCES ON MENTAL HEALTH AND THE VALUE OF LIFE



דָּאָגָה בְּלִב־אִישׁ יִשְׁחָנָה וְדָבָר טוֹב יִשְׁמַחֲנָה

If there is anxiety in a person's mind,
let him quash it and turn it into joy
with a good word. (Proverbs 12:25)

Commentary on Proverbs

Rabbi Ami and Rabbi Asi [3rd century sages who studied together in Babylonia and later became the leaders of the Beit Midrash in Tiberias] disputed the verse's meaning. One said, "The person should forcefully push the anxious thoughts out of his mind."

The other said, "It means he should tell others his concerns, which will lower his anxiety."

(Talmud Bavli, Tractate Yoma 75a)



Rashi added: "And a good word with which his friend consoles him will change the concern to rejoice." Anxiety or overactive worries are not new. Our Biblical texts and commentators were discussing the best way to respond to anxiety. The two rabbis disputed the meaning of the word that is translated as "quash" in the Proverbs text. Who do you agree with? What is the best way to handle worries or anxiety? If you could create a "proverb" or words to live by when you feel anxiety, what would you recommend for yourself or others?



JEWISH SOURCES ON MENTAL HEALTH AND THE VALUE OF LIFE

Once, the Hasidic rabbi Zusya came to his followers with tears in his eyes. They asked him, "Zusya, what's the matter?"

And he told them about his vision: "I learned the question that the angels will one day ask me about my life."

The followers were puzzled. "Zusya, you are pious. You are scholarly and humble. You have helped so many of us. What question about your life could be so terrifying that you would be frightened to answer it?"

Zusya replied, "I have learned that the angels will not ask me, 'Why weren't you a Moses, leading your people out of slavery?' and the angels will not ask me, 'Why weren't you a Joshua, leading your people into the promised land?'" Zusya sighed.

"They will say to me,
'Zusya, why weren't you Zusya?'"

(From Martin Buber's Tales of the Chasidim)



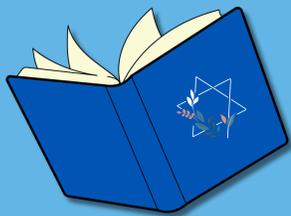
Why was Zusya upset? What does it mean to live an authentic life? What are the ways we are taught or pressured not to be our authentic selves? How does living an authentic life relate to mental health?

JEWISH SOURCES ON MENTAL HEALTH AND THE VALUE OF LIFE

From the Liturgy

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם הַנוֹתֵן לַיָּעִף כֹּחַ

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the Universe, who gives strength to the weary. (Selection from Morning Prayers)



וּבְטוּבוֹ מְחַדֵּשׁ בְּכָל יוֹם תְּמִיד מַעֲשֵׂה בְּרֵאשִׁית

Out of goodness, God renews every day the work of creation. (Excerpt from the Yotzer Or Prayer)

יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ ה' אֱלֹהֵי וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתַי. שְׁתַּשְׁלַח מְהֵרָה רְפוּאָה שְׁלֵמָה מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם. רְפוּאָת הַנֶּפֶשׁ וְרְפוּאָת הַגּוּף לְחוּלָה פִּב' פּ בְּתוֹךְ שְׂאֵר חוּלֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל

May it be Your will, my God and the God of my ancestors, that You quickly send a complete recovery from the Heavens – a recovery of the soul and a recovery of the body – to this suffering person (insert name) among the others in need of healing among Israel.

(Prayer for Recovery)

- Do you experience God as strength giving? How might the first prayer be helpful?
- What does it mean that God renews the work of creation each day? How could this message be helpful to those who are struggling?
- Did you know the traditional Jewish prayer for healing includes praying for both “nefesh” (soul) and “guf” (body)? What does this tell us about the Jewish attitude toward health?
- Do you believe prayer can help bring about our own or someone else’s healing? What helps you feel most supported when you are suffering?



RESOURCES FOR THIS SECTION

- [Shomer Collective & Blue Dove Foundation: A Jewish Guide to Supporting Individuals Through Traumatic Death](#)
- [National Alliance for Children's Grief](#)
- [This American Life Episode 557 Act 3 - Conversation with Grief Counselors at the Sharing Place](#)
- [The Sharing Place - Grief Support for Children](#)
- [The Dougy Center](#)
- [Do's and Don'ts for Talking with Grieving Teens from NACG](#)
- [Toolkit: Supporting Children Grieving a Death by Suicide from NACG](#)
- [When Your Child is Experiencing a Mental Health Crisis](#)



MI SHEBERACH FOR MENTAL HEALTH

מי שברך אבותינו אשר קרא לנו ישראל שנאמר שרית עם אלהים, הוא יברך וירפא את אלו מבינינו הנאבקים ברוחה הנפשית. יהי רצון שיכירו בכוחם ובחסנם, ויתחסו לעצמם בסליחה ובסבלנות, וימצאו עזרה, חמלה ומשאבים בעת צרתם. הקדוש ברוך הוא יעניק לאלו מאתנו שאינם חווים קשים נפשים את הכח, החסן והיכולת להקשיב ללא שפוט ומתוך כוונה, ואת היכולת להבחין כאשר אחרים נאבקים. יהי רצונך שנגזור קהלות שמקבלות, מרוממות ותומכות באלה שבינינו הנאבקים. השתא בעגלא ובזמן קריב. ונאמר אמן.

May the One who blessed our ancestors and named us Israel bless and heal those among us who struggle with mental well-being. May they acknowledge their own strength and resilience, treat themselves with forgiveness and patience, and find help, compassion, and resources when they need them. And, may the Holy One grant those of us who aren't experiencing mental health issues the strength, resilience and capacity to listen without judgment and with intention, and the ability to notice when others are struggling. May we create communities that accept, uplift, and support those among us who are struggling. Now, speedily, and in a time soon to come. Amen.

PRAYERS, RITUALS, AND STORIES FOR SUPPORT AND ENCOURAGEMENT

Mi Sheberach (Prayer for Healing) for One Who is Struggling

**May the One who blessed our ancestors,
Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,
Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah,
be with us in our struggles.**

As you blessed Jacob three times, be with us in our struggles.

May our wrestling be transformative in our struggles.

Give us patience, courage, endurance, and insight.

May the sufferer be healed in spirit and in body.

May G-d be with us. We pray for meaning in the length of our days.

Mi Sheberach for Those Contemplating Suicide



**May the One who blessed our ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,
Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah, be with us in our struggles.**

**As you blessed Jacob three times, be with us in our struggles. May our
wrestling be transformative in our struggles.**

**Give us patience, courage, endurance, and insight. May the sufferer be
healed in spirit and in body.**

May G-d be with us. We pray for meaning in the length of our days.

PRAYERS, RITUALS, AND STORIES FOR SUPPORT AND ENCOURAGEMENT

Mi Sheberach for Those Struggling with Suicidal Thoughts

May you know better days are ahead and stay with us.

May you know taking your own life is not the only path to healing.

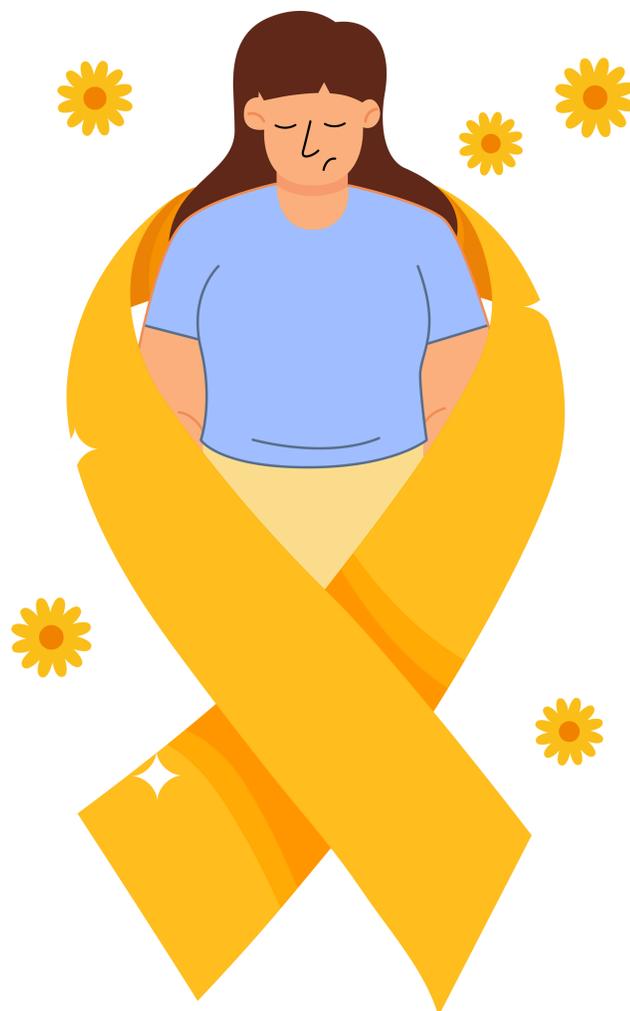
May you never be so low you make an irreversible decision.

May you find courage to reach out and cry for help so you don't suffer alone.

May your deep pain and suffering turn to harmony and tranquility as your health improves.

May you live to celebrate many milestones in peace surrounded by those who love you.

May the prayers of all who care about you bring you healing, happiness, and blessings—refuah, simcha, and bracha.

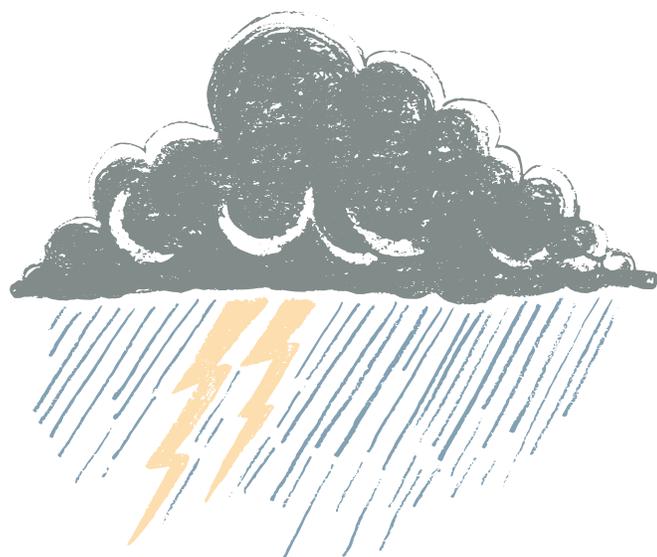


PRAYERS, RITUALS, AND STORIES FOR SUPPORT AND ENCOURAGEMENT

Mi Sheberach for those who feel overwhelmed

May you feel relief from the pressures. May the decision you make be based on joy, not fear. May your interactions with others bring you happiness, as you see the holy spark inside everyone around you. May you focus less on the differences between you and others, and more on the connections that bring us all together. May you be kind to yourself, giving yourself the same chesed that you give to others.

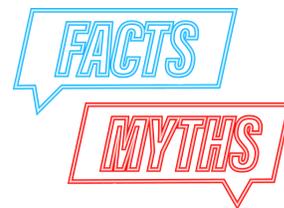
- By Robin & Janine



SUICIDE MYTHS AND FACTS

Suicide can affect anyone. No group remains immune from this tragic occurrence. Some demographic groups like veterans and LGBTQ+ individuals have well-known risk rates. Others, such as adults who are 75 and older, have risk rates that may be less well known. Learning the facts and debunking myths about suicide can help us recognize how important it is to address the challenges facing those we love, whether they involve their mental health or have to do with major life changes. These facts and statistics are meant to give us the information we need in order to provide as much help, hope, and resources to as many people as possible. The goal is to help us recognize signs someone is experiencing suicidal thoughts, so we can do something to reduce the likelihood they will carry out the suicide.

Important common myths and facts about suicide –
adapted from the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI):



Myth: Suicide only affects individuals with a mental health condition.

Fact: Many individuals with mental illness are not affected by suicidal thoughts and not all people who attempt or die by suicide have mental illness. Relationship problems and other life stressors such as criminal/legal matters, persecution,

eviction/loss of home, death of a loved one, a devastating or debilitating illness, trauma, sexual abuse, rejection, and recent or impending crises are also associated with suicidal thoughts and attempts.

Myth: Once an individual is suicidal, [they] will always remain suicidal.

Fact: Active suicidal ideation is often short term and situation specific. Studies have shown that approximately 54 percent of individuals who have died by suicide did not have a diagnosable mental health disorder. And for those with mental illness,

the proper treatment can help to reduce symptoms. The act of suicide is often an attempt to control deep, painful emotions and thoughts an individual is experiencing. Once these thoughts dissipate, so will the suicidal ideation. While suicidal thoughts can return, they are not necessarily permanent. An individual with suicidal thoughts and attempts can live a long, successful life.

SUICIDE MYTHS AND FACTS

Myth: Most suicides happen suddenly without warning.

These loved ones may not recognize what's going on, which is why it may seem like the suicide was sudden or without warning.

Myth: People who die by suicide are selfish and take the easy way out.

Individuals who experience suicidal ideations do not do so by choice. They are not simply “thinking of themselves” but rather are going through a very serious mental health symptom due to either mental illness or a difficult life situation.

Myth: Talking about suicide will lead to and/or encourage suicide.

talk more about suicide. We hope debunking these common myths will allow individuals to look at suicide from a different angle—one of understanding and compassion for an individual who is struggling internally. Maybe they are struggling with a mental illness, or maybe they are under extreme pressure and do not have healthy coping skills or a strong support system.

As a society, we should not be afraid to speak up about suicide, to speak up about mental illness or to seek treatment for an individual in need. Eliminating the stigma starts by understanding why suicide occurs and advocating for mental health awareness within our communities.

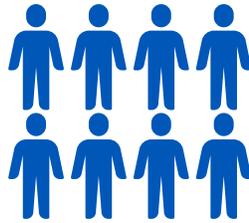


SUICIDE MYTHS AND FACTS

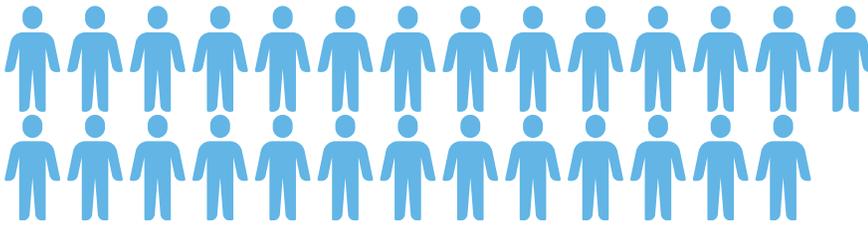
For every suicide death...



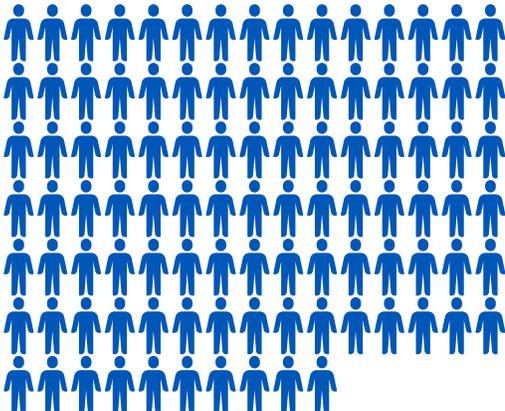
4 HOSPITALIZATIONS
FOR SUICIDE
ATTEMPTS



8 EMERGENCY
DEPARTMENT VISITS
RELATED TO SUICIDE



27 SELF-REPORTED
SUICIDE
ATTEMPTS



275 PEOPLE WHO
SERIOUSLY
CONSIDERED
SUICIDE

This means the preventative actions people take when considering suicide can help. For more information on risk disparities in suicide, see this **CDC fact sheet**. For more information on helping a loved one who is struggling, see, "[What to do if a community member is experiencing suicidal thoughts.](#)"

For more information on creating a communal environment that is protective, see, "[How can we create a communal environment that supports mental health?](#)"

*Source: <https://www.cdc.gov/suicide/suicide-data-statistics.html>

STORIES TO SHARE TO “QUIET THE SILENCE” AND RAISE AWARENESS FOR SUICIDE PREVENTION

Her sister died of a drug overdose and it spurred her to “Quiet the Silence” in her personal and professional life: **Her Hidden Struggle**

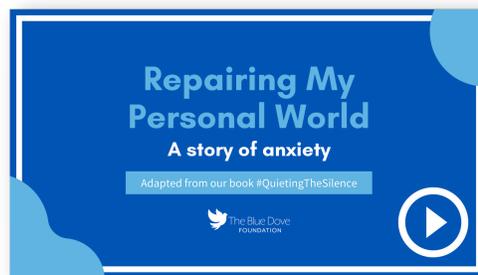
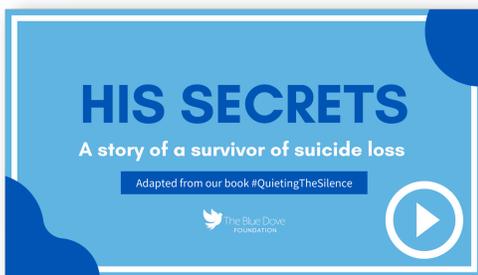
“We have grown our souls through this journey” A mother faces her daughter’s addiction: **I didn’t cause it, I can’t control it, I can’t cure it**

“You’re not broken, you’re whole--and you just need help to feel that way.” One woman’s story of hitting rock bottom and reaching out for support: **Repairing My Personal World**

A new diagnosis explained his depression—and changed the course of his career: **My Emotional Rollercoaster**

No one was allowed to know he struggled with depression and anxiety—until she lost him to suicide: **His Secrets**

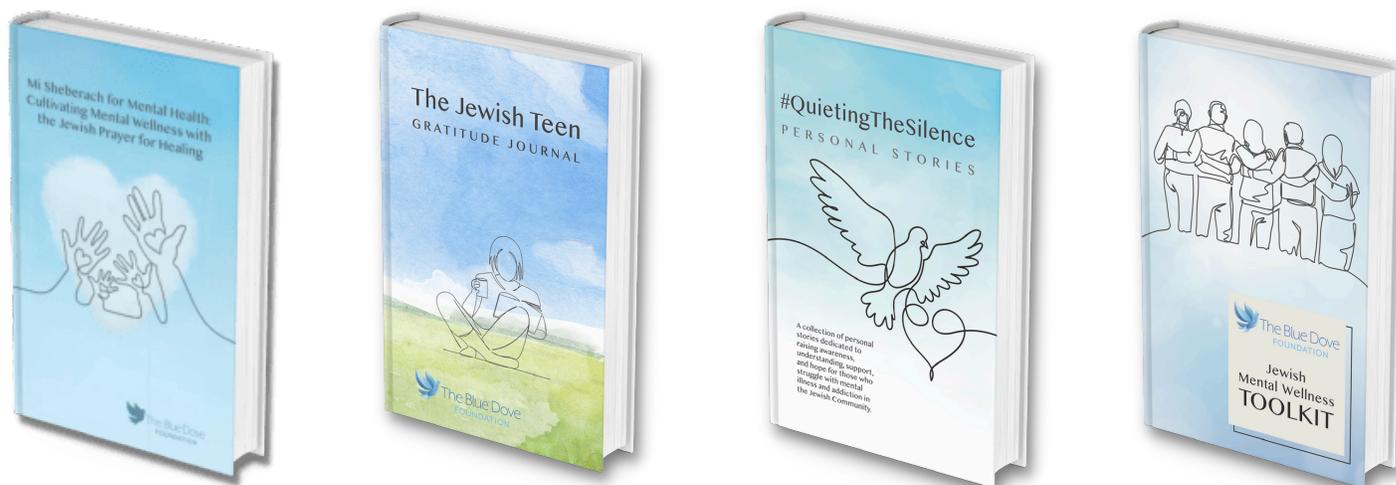
A rabbi whose brother took his own life challenges us to support those in a mental health crisis the same way we do with those battling cancer: **Lessons from Loss**



Read the full stories, and support our work in preventing stories like these, consider purchasing your own copy of our book, **[#QuietTheSilence: Personal Stories here.](#)**

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The Blue Dove Foundation has a variety of resources and publications available to help bring Judaism and mental wellness to your life and community, including **publications**:



Mental Wellness and Jewish holiday resources:



The Blue Dove Foundation also is thrilled to offer a number of incredible workshops to help bring mental health and wellness to your community, utilizing both medically backed information and resources, and relevant and impactful Jewish sources. This gives the materials a sense of practical significance and spiritual depth.