

Social-Emotional Learning and Youth Suicide Prevention

Committee for Children conducted a review of literature and found that Social-emotional learning (SEL) skills can address and mitigate known risk factors for youth suicide, thus providing one avenue for upstream prevention.

The Problem

- Youth suicide is on the rise across the country.
- It's one of the top two causes of premature death of youth between ages 10 and 19.¹
- Approximately one in 12 high schoolers have attempted suicide; middle schoolers have nearly as high a rate.²

Findings

Social-emotional learning can combat youth suicide. Hopelessness, anxiety, substance use, and child sexual abuse are known risk factors for suicidal thoughts and behaviors. SEL curricula, as effective universal Tier I (all-student) interventions, promote skills related to protective factors that mitigate those risk factors.

Suicide Risk Factors and Social-Emotional Competencies that Mitigate Them

Risk Factor	Self-Awareness	Self-Management	Responsible Decision Making	Social Awareness	Relationship Skills
Hopelessness	●	●			●
Anxiety	●	●	●	●	●
Substance Use		●	●	●	●
Child Sexual Abuse	●	●		●	●

Recommendations for Policy Makers

- Include social-emotional learning within comprehensive youth suicide prevention efforts
- Fund comprehensive prevention that includes SEL to mitigate risk upstream
- Fund research and evaluation of SEL interventions for youth suicide, as they have yet to be studied rigorously
- Learn from local examples of SEL in suicide prevention, such as in Tooele, Utah³ and Jeffco County, Colorado⁴

For the full document of these findings and more information, go to cfchildren.org/policy-advocacy

References

1. Curtin, S.C. & Heron, M. (2019). *Death rates due to suicide and homicide among persons aged 10–24: United States, 2000–2017* (NCHS Data Brief No. 352). Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics.
2. Mazza, J. (2006). Youth suicidal behavior: A crisis in need of attention. In F. A. Villarruel, & Luster, T. (Eds). *Adolescent mental health* (pp. 156–177). Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group.
3. <https://www.secondstep.org/success-stories/tooele-a-district-and-community-respond-to-trauma>
4. <https://wheatridgetranscript.com/stories/with-suicidal-ideation-high-in-jeffco-groups-launch-community-trainings,291213>