

September is National Suicide Prevention Awareness Month. **All** month, mental health advocates, prevention organizations, survivors, allies, and community members unite to promote suicide prevention awareness.

Suicide is a public health concern and suicide data should be available to community members. According to provisional data, 49,500 people took their own lives last year in the United States, the highest number year to date. Five Ohioans die by suicide every day, and one youth dies every 34 hours. Suicide rates in southeast Ohio are among the highest in the state for 2021, with Meigs County having the 5th highest. This hits very close to home with 11 suicides in Meigs County from 2021 to date in 2023.

The unfortunate impact of stigma around suicide is people not seeking help when they need it, while those who have lived experience of suicidal distress internalize their feelings of shame because of how society views them. If a person has experienced stigma in the past, they may be reluctant to reach out for help again.

Stigma also affects those whom have lost someone to suicide. They may experience negative attitudes from others and social awkwardness, in addition to feeling rejection, shame and blame. Because of the taboo and stigma attached to suicide, too many people think they should not bring "it" up at all. The grieving person can experience a devastating and isolating sense they have been abandoned at a time when they most need support.

When speaking of suicide, appropriate language should be used as certain phrases and words can further stigmatize suicide, spread myths, and undermine suicide prevention objectives such as "committed suicide" or referring to suicide as "successful," "unsuccessful" or a "failed attempt." Instead use, "died by suicide" or "killed him/herself." Emphasize suicidal thoughts and behaviors are not weaknesses or flaws and can be reduced with support and treatment.

988 is the new three-digit dialing code for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, now called the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. Anyone, anywhere in the U.S. can now call, chat, or text 988 and receive resources and support during a suicide, mental health, or substance use crisis. Ideally, callers are connected with a local counselor. However, if the local center is unable to answer, the Lifeline reroutes calls to backup centers in their network. The ultimate goal of 988 is to provide individuals experiencing a crisis to appropriate and supportive assistance during their time of need.

Suicide is preventable and everyone can help prevent a suicide loss. Participate in local suicide prevention efforts and attend suicide prevention trainings to learn warning signs and how to help someone that may be thinking about suicide. Resources and information on how you can join local efforts can be found at gjmsuicideprevention.com, on Facebook @[@gjmsuicideprevention](https://www.facebook.com/gjmsuicideprevention), or by calling 740-446-3022.

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