

MENTAL HEALTH AND COVID-19

Q & A

COVID-19 IN VERMONT: ADDRESSING SELF-HARM AND SUICIDE RISKS

The University of Vermont is dedicated to supporting our community through the COVID-19 pandemic. Research from past disease outbreaks and studies of other humanitarian crises suggest that people may become more vulnerable to self-harming and suicidal behaviors during these times¹. Extended disruptions in the lives of individuals, families and communities can impact mental health. Not all impacts are negative, but many are. People are more likely to experience loss, anxiety and depression; the painful impacts of unemployment and financial stress, more domestic violence, child abuse, and lack of access to treatment and recovery supports. These negative impacts may be greater in people with pre-existing mental health or related conditions.

HOW COVID-19 IS DIFFERENT

The unique factors we are seeing with COVID-19 may call for different types of support from mental health professionals and other health care providers including:

- Isolation associated with “stay at home” orders
- Uncertainty about when the pandemic will end, or get better
- Separation from loved ones when they are hospitalized, even if they are dying
- Not having normal rituals like graduations and funeral services due to social distancing, and
- Fear and worry about the high risk of exposure to the virus among health care providers and other essential workers

COPING STRATEGIES

Develop Resilience

Resilience is the ability to bounce back from stress, adversity, failure, challenges, or even trauma. Resiliency can be built up in individuals and communities over time and will help them deal with stress. The Vermont Departments of Health and Mental Health websites offer strategies for individuals, caregivers and providers to help build resilience by developing healthy coping skills, establishing routines, self-care and caring for others during COVID-19.

Check in with Others

It is more important than ever to connect with your family, friends and others. Especially if you are worried about their mental or emotional health. If you don't know what to say, we recommend starting a conversation like this: “A lot of people are pretty stressed right now. How are you doing?” If you are concerned that someone might be at risk for harming themselves—then ask. The Vermont Suicide Prevention Center suggests a technique called “SAG,” which means:

- **Show** you care
- **Ask** if the person is thinking of taking their life
- **Get** them to help if they say they want to die by suicide

Asking someone if they are thinking of killing or harming themselves does NOT lead to people engaging in these behaviors. Call the national suicide lifeline (800-273-8255), text VT to 741741 (Crisis Text Line) or contact a Designated Agency crisis line.

¹ Wasserman IM (1992) *Suicide and Life Threatening Behavior*.

Acknowledgements: Employees of NCSS and the Vermont Departments of Health and Mental Health provided feedback on this document. Please contact Thomas.Delaney@uvm.edu with questions or comments.

Seek Help

What should you do when an individual is experiencing a mental health crisis during COVID-19? In the past, a common recommendation was to bring someone to a hospital emergency department for care in a crisis. However, many people with symptoms of COVID-19 are receiving care at emergency departments all around Vermont, which increases the risk of exposure to the virus. Some alternatives for helping someone at risk for hurting themselves are:

- Contact the mental health crisis services in your community. Crisis workers will assess the person's risk and develop a plan to help them stay safe.

- Vermont's robust mental health system continues to provide treatment to people with a variety of mental health and addiction-related needs.
- Designated Agencies (like the Howard Center in Chittenden County, NCSS in Franklin County and HCRS in Southern Vermont) are enrolling new individual, child and family clients into different types of services, including crisis services.
- Each designated agency has its own crisis line and many other services are available.
- Many mental health providers in Vermont have successfully transitioned to tele-therapy and tele-psychiatry models.

Resource	Services	Contact Information
National Suicide Prevention Lifeline	Immediate, free and confidential support to people experiencing suicidal thoughts and feelings. Connects people to services in Vermont.	800-273-8255 (273-TALK)
Crisis Text Line	Free and confidential text-based support.	Text VT to 741741
National Veterans Crisis Line	Confidential support for veterans and those who care for veterans.	800-273-8255 (273-TALK) & press 1 or text to 838255
Disaster Distress Helpline	Free crisis counseling for people who experienced a natural or human-caused disaster.	800-985-5990 or text TalkWithUS to 66746
Trevor Project	Support for LGBTQ+ people aged 25 and younger.	1-866-488-7386 or text START to 678678
VT Dept. of Mental Health	Information on mental health services, including during COVID-19 For community members and providers.	mentalhealth.vermont.gov
Vermont Suicide Prevention Center	Resources and trainings for communities, schools, mental health and healthcare organizations.	vtspc.org
Vermont 211	Connects to services including mental health, substance use, social services and healthcare.	Call 211 or text your zip code to 898211
NAMI Vermont	Vermont chapter of the National Alliance for Mental Illness, includes resources on COVID-19.	namivt.org/
VT Dept. of Health	Provides wide-ranging resources about COVID-19.	healthvermont.gov/response/coronavirus-covid-19
VT Helplink	Support & referrals for Vermonters around alcohol and drug use.	vthelplink.org/ or call 802.565.LINK (toll free 833.565.LINK)
Vermont Designated Agency		Crisis Phone Line
Clara Martin Center		800-639-6360
Rutland Mental Health Services		802-775-1000
Counseling Service of Addison County		802-388-7641
Health Care & Rehabilitation Services (SE VT)		800-622-4235
Howard Center (Chittenden County)		802-488-7777
Lamoille County Mental Health Services		802-888-8888
Northeast Kingdom Human Services		Derby 802-334-6744, St. Johnsbury 802-748-3181
Northwestern Counseling & Support Services		802-524-6554
United Counseling Service of Bennington County		Manchester 802-362-3950, Bennington 802-442-5491
Washington County Mental Health		802-229-0591



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