



Suicide is a significant global public health concern, with suicide rates continuing to rise in America. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that 49,449 Americans lost their lives to suicide in 2022, up from 48,183 deaths in 2021.

Within the law enforcement community, suicide rates are notably higher than the general population due to factors such as job-related stress, exposure to trauma, and stigma surrounding mental health issues.

The Harris County Sheriff’s Office recognizes that raising awareness, providing support, and implementing targeted prevention strategies within our agency are essential for addressing this critical issue and promoting the mental health and well-being of our sheriff’s office family.

The Harris County Sheriff’s Office (HCSO) is a leader in behavioral health training and is recognized as a Department of Justice Learning Site through the Council of State Governments. In collaboration with the HCSO Academy, BHD Clinical Staff, and internal and external partners, the Behavioral Health Training Unit offers a comprehensive suicide prevention framework. Training includes Crisis Intervention Training (CIT), CIT Wellness Mandates, Active Bystandership for Law Enforcement (ABLE), Jailer Mental Health Certification, Peer Support Network Training, and Mental Health Peace Officer Certification.

The HCSO fosters a climate that:

- Encourages personnel to seek help and build resilience.
- Increases awareness about behavioral healthcare and reduces the stigma for employees who seek behavioral healthcare.
- Protects the privacy of employees seeking or receiving treatment relating to suicidal behavior.
- Emphasizes a training framework on suicide prevention.

Access to services for HCSO personnel:

- HCSO Behavioral Health Division (BHD): 346-286-3150
- HCSO Peer Support Network: 346-286-3175
- HCSO Chaplain: 832-233-4387
- HCSO Family Assistance: 832-370-6569
- EAP Services through AETNA’s Resources for Living: 833-657-2111.

For immediate crisis response, contact EDC for CIRT deployment.

Do you feel suicidal? Recommended Actions:

- Seek immediate help in crisis (call 988 or visit an ER).
- Consult a licensed mental health provider for non-urgent cases.
- Use distress tolerance skills (e.g., ice packs, cold showers).
- Practice breathing exercises to help calm down.
- View suicidal thoughts as temptations that can be resisted.
- Develop a plan to cope with suicidal urges.
- Turn away from harmful habits or addictions.
- Engage in meaningful activities that promote mental well-being, personal growth, and a sense of purpose.



RECOGNIZING WARNING SIGNS:

Individuals considering suicide often experience intense psychological pain, known as "mental pain" or "psychache," resulting from emotional wounds, guilt, shame, and loss. They may feel isolated and misunderstood, leading them to believe suicide is the only solution.

It is essential to emphasize that these individuals are not alone and that professional support can help alleviate their suffering, restore hope, and foster meaningful connections with others.

Individuals experiencing suicidal ideation often have negative thoughts about themselves and their future, leading to distorted perceptions of their situations. These thoughts are distorted and inaccurate.

Professional support can help them replace negative thoughts with positive, rational ones and develop strategies to manage distress. By treating suicidal thoughts as temptations, individuals can learn to resist acting on them and seek healthier coping mechanisms. With guidance, they can improve problem-solving skills and build resilience to overcome these challenges.

Encourage individuals experiencing suicidal ideation to recognize their self-worth and distance themselves from harmful habits that exacerbate their pain. Prayer and faith can provide solace and a path toward healing. Remind them that their experiences can be valuable in helping others going through similar struggles, emphasizing their importance in the world and the department. With time, support, and courage, their pain will diminish, and they will regain joy and purpose. Emphasize the importance of empathy and connection with others to overcome their suffering and support those in need.

Be alert for colleagues showing relationship problems, substance misuse, hopelessness, or acute psychiatric distress.

From 2016 to 2022, there were 1,287 public safety personnel - identified in the report as law enforcement and corrections officers - who died by suicide.

Depression (34%) and PTSD (27%) were the most prevalent mental health challenges leading to officer deaths.

In nearly all cases, the officer was off duty, and the officers used a firearm.

Source: ABC News, "About 184 law enforcement officers die by suicide each year: Report." By Luke Barr, March 20, 2024.

Resources

988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline: Call, Text, or Chat.

Crisis Intervention of Houston: 832-416-1177. Teens call 832-416-1199 or text to 281-201-4430.

LGBT Switchboard Houston: 713-529-3211.

Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Greater Houston: 713-970-4483.

Suicide Prevention - VA Houston Health Care: 800-273-8255.

Texas Youth Helpline: 855-311-1790.

Para Llamadas en Espanol: 1-888-628-9454.

The Harris Center for Mental Health and IDD: 713-970-7000.

Harris County Sheriff's Office Crisis: 713-221-6000.

"Officers benefit most when they can access an inter-agency, multilayered mental health and wellness response mechanism that includes training, supportive leadership, peer support services, crisis response teams for trauma, and law enforcement-focused clinicians."

Source: "Law Enforcement Officer Suicide: 2020 Report to Congress" by the Community Oriented Policing Services of the U.S. Department of Justice.

Related Policies

258 - Suicide Prevention; 418 - Behavioral Health Division