



**SHAKES  
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# Julius Caesar

## 2021-22 Study Guide

### ABOUT THIS STUDY GUIDE

The Colorado Shakespeare Festival will soon share a Shakespeare & Violence Prevention project with your school. This study guide is a resource for you, whether you are an administrator, counselor, teacher, or student. Our program is most successful when participants have prepared in advance, so we encourage you to use this study guide to connect the material to your curriculum. Shakespeare offers a wonderful opportunity to explore meaningful questions, and we encourage you and your students to engage deeply with those questions.

Study guide written and edited by Dr. Amanda Giguere and Dr. Heidi Schmidt, with input from Lulu Buck (Educational Equity & Community Engagement, St. Vrain Valley School District), Georgina Owen (Colorado Office of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Education), Judi Hofmeister (Colorado Department of Education), Dr. Lena Heilmann (Colorado's Office of Suicide Prevention), Laurie Keith (Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence), Mark Lanning (Safe2Tell), and Josue Miranda (actor and translator).



### ABOUT SHAKESPEARE & VIOLENCE PREVENTION

The Colorado Shakespeare Festival (CSF) partners with CU Boulder's Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence (CSPV) and the Department of Theatre & Dance to create an interdisciplinary program that increases awareness of Shakespeare and violence prevention.

You will soon watch a filmed performance of CSF's abridged four-actor version of *Julius Caesar* that explores the cycle of violence, using research from the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence. In a 45-minute performance and a 50-minute workshop, we draw parallels between Shakespeare's world and our own. We recommend the performance for grades 6 through 12.

Theatre is about teamwork, empathy, and change. When your students watch the play, they will observe mistreatment, cruelty, and characters who try to solve their problems with violence. They'll see examples of unhealthy and destructive relationships, as well as characters who become "upstanders"—people who make the choice to help. This play is intended to open up the dialogue about the cycle of violence and mistreatment—and to remind us all that change is always possible.

The classroom workshops, facilitated by actors from the performance, use theatre activities to increase your students' ability to work as a team and be upstanders. We employ empathy-building and team-building activities, key elements in creating a positive school environment.

We encourage you to continue this conversation after these workshops in order to create positive change in your own school.

### 2020 COLORADO CURRICULUM STANDARDS

This program was developed with a standards-based focus in multiple content areas. Content areas addressed by the performances, classroom workshops, and the contents of this study guide include:

- Comprehensive Health
- Reading, Writing, and Communicating
- Drama and Theatre Arts
- Culturally Responsive Teaching
- Social and Emotional Learning



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## ABOUT JULIUS CAESAR

### Why this play?

Caesar's power in Rome is growing, and many Romans are worried. What dangers might Rome face with a leader whose power is limitless? What should the citizens do to preserve Rome's republic? Several Romans who are dissatisfied with their present leader choose to address the problem using violence. Cassius persuades Brutus and Casca to join a plot to kill Caesar. Despite many warning signs, the plotters succeed and murder Caesar in the Capitol. Rome is plunged into civil war, and the political, personal, and social problems escalate. In the midst of a losing battle, Brutus and Cassius both find themselves in a seemingly hopeless situation, and they die by suicide. Antony is left to pick up the pieces of a collapsed Rome.

*Julius Caesar*, the original "backstabbing" story, centers on the destructive aftermath of a planned violent attack. How many opportunities were there to prevent the violence? How did one act of violence quickly lead to more violence? How does mob mentality impact one's ability to see others as fully human? The play speaks to the present moment, and raises questions about how to function as a society, how to respond to leaders we disagree with, and how planned attacks impact a community.

### Four-Person Cast

Shakespeare's version of this play has more than fifty characters; we combined some roles and eliminated others, but we still have eleven characters, played by four actors. The challenge becomes how we differentiate these characters--look out for different costume pieces to help you keep track!

### Bilingual Shakespeare

This production features Spanish-speaking characters. How does this choice impact the way you hear and experience the play?

## CONTENT WARNING FOR JULIUS CAESAR

*Julius Caesar* is a play about a planned attack in a public setting, and the storyline involves the deaths of two characters by suicide. This content may be triggering to some members of your school community. We encourage you to have conversations with your students prior to the performance, particularly students who may have been personally impacted by recent trauma. Please work with your students to make the most appropriate decisions for them regarding viewing the performance and participating in post-show workshops. If you are concerned about a student, below are some resources:

### Resources

- **Counseling team** at your school
- **Colorado Crisis Services** (confidential and immediate support if you are in crisis or need help dealing with one, or if you are looking for additional resources): 1-844-493-8255; text "TALK" to 38255; [www.coloradocrisiservices.org](http://www.coloradocrisiservices.org)
- **Ayuda en Español.** Lifeline ofrece 24/7, gratuito servicios en español, no es necesario hablar inglés si usted necesita ayuda. Cuando usted llama al número 1-888-628-9454, su llamada se dirige al centro de ayuda de nuestra red disponible más cercano.
- **Safe2Tell** (anonymous reporting, connects with local law enforcement and other resources): 1-877-542-7233; [www.safe2tell.org](http://www.safe2tell.org)
- **Cyber Bullying Research Center** (resources, research, and presentations about cyberbullying, directed by Dr. Sameer Hinduja and Dr. Justin W. Patchin): [cyberbullying.org](http://cyberbullying.org)

### Protective Factors

- Sufficient Sleep
- Supportive relationships
- Feeling connected to peers, school, family, and community
- Involvement in prosocial activities
- Having a trusted adult
- Feeling safe at school



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# How Do I Prepare?

This might be your students' first exposure to theatre and/or Shakespeare, so we recommend establishing some norms with your students to prepare for this program:

- In theatre, actors are vulnerable onstage; they step into the shoes of another character (metaphorically) and help us see the world from another person's perspective. For actors to do their jobs, they need to know that their audience will respect their work, their bravery, and their honesty.
- We will respect the actors, we will respect one another, and we will respect ourselves. How do we cultivate a classroom of mutual respect, whether in person or online?
- Trying new things is hard! When we work with CSF actors, we might be asked to step out of our comfort zone and participate in some activities. Let's support one another for being brave, being honest, and for trying new things.
- The Shakespeare & Violence Prevention post-performance workshops emphasize three key ideas: Teamwork, Empathy, and Change. What do these things have in common? How can we prepare ourselves to work as a team, practice empathy, and rehearse the change we'd like to see in our community?

## TEACHER CHECKLIST

- Review the introduction to Characters & Plot (pg. 4-5) with your students.
- Use the Mini-Lesson Plan (pg. 7), Anticipation Guide (pg. 8), and Comparing the Text (pg. 9) activities to help your students think through some of the big questions presented in *Julius Caesar* in advance of the performance.
- Discuss digital citizenship with your students, such as not sharing the performance with friends outside your school. If the actors are joining your classroom virtually, what norms have you established in your class about videoconferencing (i.e. private chats, video on/off, or muting when not speaking)?
- Be ready to participate in the workshop, step into a role-play, and point out connections to your own curriculum. The more involved you are, the more your students learn!
- Talk with your class about the upcoming actor-led theatre workshop. Set expectations about trying new things and respecting one another.
- If possible, push desks/chairs to the side of your classroom to create an open, movement-friendly space.
- IN PERSON: At the end of the workshop, our teaching artist will step out of the room while you conduct an anonymous, 3-question poll with your students. Don't worry about preparing - they'll give you a card with the questions pre-printed.
- ONLINE: At the end of the workshop, our teaching artist will leave the virtual classroom while you conduct the poll with your students. All of the questions and instructions are included [here](#). (If you are unable to complete the poll, please share [this link](#) with your students so they can take the poll on their own.)

## What should I do after the visit?

- [Take this 5-minute survey](#) to give us feedback on the program. (This is different from the student poll above.)
- Use the Discussion Questions (pg. 10) to have a follow-up discussion with your students about the performance and the workshops.
- Look for ways to integrate the ideas and questions raised in the Shakespeare & Violence Prevention program into your lesson plans throughout the year.

**Hyperlink Key:** Copy and paste if you have difficulty with any of the embedded links above.

- WORKSHOP POLL: Teachers, input full class numbers here: <https://forms.gle/QFQgGUovsBiJbuzf6>
- WORKSHOP POLL: Individual student responses here: <https://forms.gle/HFM7FZogtN3gyz698>
- PROGRAM SURVEY (TEACHERS, ADMINS): [https://cuboulder.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_6wVW0wgsj3nKEgS](https://cuboulder.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6wVW0wgsj3nKEgS)



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# Meet the Characters

(and the actors who play them)



## JULIUS CAESAR

An experienced and honored general of Rome who has just led Rome to victory in war against Pompey.



## BRUTUS

A powerful Roman who is pulled into the conspiracy by Cassius.



## CASSIUS

A concerned Roman who masterminds the plot to assassinate Caesar.



## CALPURNIA

Caesar's wife, who has a bad feeling about Caesar going to the Capitol, and tries to persuade him to stay home.



## PONCIO

Husband and confidante to Brutus (a Spanish-speaking character in the CSF production).



## MARK ANTONY

Caesar's closest friend who ultimately rouses the mob against the conspirators who plot to kill Caesar.



## CASCA

A cynical Roman who is convinced by Cassius to strike down Caesar.



## CINNA

A poet who is attacked by an angry mob.



## SOOTHSAYER

A fortuneteller who attempts to warn Caesar about the impending danger. (Spanish-speaking)



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# Plot Synopsis

After Caesar returns to Rome in triumph from winning a war with Pompey, a Soothsayer (fortuneteller) warns Caesar to “beware the Ides of March.” Caesar ignores the Soothsayer.

In a stormy night of unnatural events, Cassius convinces Brutus and Casca that Caesar is too powerful and is a threat to Rome’s continued freedom and peace. Cassius persuades the others to join the plot to assassinate Caesar. Brutus confides in Poncio.

The conspirators kill Caesar. Shortly after the attack, Brutus permits Mark Antony to deliver a funeral speech. Antony uses this speech to rouse a mob of citizens against the conspirators.

**What consequences will Brutus, Cassius and Casca face for killing Caesar? How will this action ripple through Rome? Will the violence bring peace or more violence?**

## Mary Rippon Outdoor Theatre

In the performance you watch, our actors are performing at night in the beautiful, historic, Mary Rippon Outdoor Theatre. This is the Colorado Shakespeare Festival’s home theatre, where professional Shakespeare plays are staged under the stars each summer. Typically, CSF actors perform for 1,000 audience members each night.



The Mary Rippon Outdoor Theatre is named after the first female professor at the University of Colorado and the first woman in the U.S. to teach at a state university. The Mary Rippon Outdoor Theatre was officially completed in 1939, but no plays were staged there until 1944, when Shakespeare teacher James Sandoe was asked to direct a play for the coming summer.

Because the Department of the Navy occupied the indoor University Theatre during World War II, Sandoe decided to try out the new Mary Rippon complex with a production of *Romeo and Juliet*, thereby starting the tradition that would grow into the Colorado Shakespeare Festival.

## Land Acknowledgment

We honor and acknowledge that the Colorado Shakespeare Festival resides on the traditional territories and ancestral homelands of the Arapaho, Cheyenne, and Ute Nations. We recognize the sophisticated and intricate knowledge systems Indigenous people have developed in relationship to their lands and respect the many diverse Indigenous peoples still connected to this land.





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# Meet the Director



**WENDY FRANZ**  
(she/her). Managing Director of the Colorado Shakespeare Festival. Wendy has directed, produced, and designed sound for numerous productions and served in arts administration roles in professional theatre and academia since

2001. She was a charter ensemble member and production manager for Paragon Theatre and has also worked with CU Boulder's Department of Theatre & Dance, Ashton Productions, square product theatre, Goddess Here Productions, Curious Theatre, Santa Fe Opera, Colorado Dance Theatre and Little Theatre of the Rockies. Wendy received her BA in theatre directing and design/technology from the University of Northern Colorado.

## What does a director do?

A director helps to tell the story of the play in the clearest way possible by devising a concept (where and when is the story happening?) for the production and communicating to the cast and design team what the heart of the story is (what should audience members walk away thinking about? Feeling? Talking about? Debating about?). The director works with the cast and design team to connect with the audience, draw them into the story, and inspire them to empathize with the characters onstage.

## What drew you to this play?

*Julius Caesar* is such a gripping, adaptable play. It examines big, philosophical issues while also tapping into very intimate friendships and relationships--it operates on both macro and micro levels.

## What moment in the play do you find most appealing as a director?

The moment when the citizen mob corners and attacks the innocent poet, Cinna, is very complex and poignant to me. That moment embodies the danger of mob mentality and what is destroyed when individuals stop thinking critically for themselves.

## Why do you think this play matters today?

The lessons that the characters in the play have to learn the hard way, like putting themselves in another's shoes before judging, like standing up and speaking out when someone seeks to harm someone else, are so essential in our world today.

## What is challenging about directing a 4 actor version of *Julius Caesar*?

This is an epic story to tell with only 4 actors, especially when the full Shakespeare play has over 50 characters! Making sure that the heart of the story is intact and that the audience can follow the essential action of the story, even though a lot of lines have been cut is a challenge. The director has to help the actors fill in the blanks of missing action in the story, make the different characters they play distinct, and immediately establish the relationships between characters.

## What do you hope your audience will experience when watching this production?

I hope audience members can see themselves or someone they know in some of the characters. I hope they engage with the action onstage and feel curious about why the characters make the choices they make.

## During the Performance: Things to Look For

- Warning signs
- A power imbalance
- Someone confiding in another person
- A planned attack
- Manipulation through peer pressure
- An opportunity to speak up and prevent harm
- Moments of empathy
- An angry mob
- A persuasive speech
- Moments of reconciliation
- A character attempting to solve a problem with violence
- Words used as weapons
- A character asking questions or stopping to think before making an important decision



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# Mini-Lesson Plan Before the Performance

## INSTRUCTIONS FOR TEACHERS

**Rationale:** This mini-lesson will introduce students to the plot of the Colorado Shakespeare Festival's production of *Julius Caesar*, some key ideas of this production, and prepare them to take part in a Shakespeare & Violence Prevention workshop with one of CSF's actors.

**Objective:** Students will be able to discuss and defend their opinions about key themes and ideas related to *Julius Caesar* and use personal experience to relate the classic story to creating positive change in their own school climate.

**Instructions:** Use this study guide to introduce the plot points and key themes and ideas of *Julius Caesar* to your students.

**Anticipation Guide:** Put students in small groups and hand out the Anticipation Guide (p. 8), which asks students to defend their opinion about key ideas related to *Julius Caesar*. Explain that there are no right or wrong answers and they should fully discuss each statement with their group before writing down their answer.

Remind them that it is okay if their answers do not match the others in their group. After each group has completed their work, lead a class discussion about answers that differed in groups. Ask students to remember their answers as they watch the play. After the play, continue the discussion and ask if any opinions have changed.

**Comparing Texts:** Put students in small groups and hand out the Text Comparison worksheet, which asks the students to compare and contrast the original text of *Julius Caesar* and our edited version of the text. Explain that students should fully discuss the impact of editing the script, then create their own edited version of the speech as a group. Ask students to remember their responses as they watch and discuss the play.

### 2020 COLORADO ACADEMIC STANDARDS

<https://www.cde.state.co.us/standardsandinstruction/standards>

#### Drama and Theatre Arts: Standard 3: Critically Respond

- 3.1 Perceive and analyze artistic work
- 3.2 Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work
- 3.4 Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural and historical context to deepen understanding

#### Reading, Writing and Communicating: Standard 1: Oral Expression and Listening

- Prepared Graduates: collaborate effectively as group members or leaders who listen actively and respectfully; pose thoughtful questions, acknowledge the ideas of others; and contribute ideas to further the group's attainment of an objective

#### Reading, Writing and Communicating: Standard 2: Reading for All Purposes

- Prepared Graduates: read a wide range of literary texts to build knowledge and to better understand the human experience

#### Comprehensive Health: Standard 4: Prevention and Risk Management

- Prepared Graduates: apply knowledge and skills that promote healthy, violence-free relationships

#### SEL (Social and Emotional Learning) Core Competencies <https://casel.org>

- *Self Awareness:* Self confidence
- *Social Awareness:* Perspective-taking, empathy, respect for others
- *Responsible Decision-Making:* analyzing situations, solving problems, reflecting, ethical responsibility

- *Relationship Skills:* Communication, social engagement, relationship building, teamwork

#### Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT)

<https://www.understood.org/en/school-learning/for-educators/universal-design-for-learning/what-is-culturally-responsive-teaching>

- Students bring their expertise to the table
- Promote respect for student differences
- Bring real-world issues into the classroom
- Develop and maintain student relationships

**NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_

**ACTIVITY 1: ANTICIPATION GUIDE**

<b>STATEMENT</b>	<b>AGREE</b>	<b>DISAGREE</b>	<b>EXPLAIN YOUR ANSWER WITH AN EXAMPLE</b>
A group of people can easily change the opinion of an individual.			
A planned act of violence always has warning signs.			
If someone confides in you, you must keep that information confidential.			
Violent words or actions always lead to more violence.			
Words are more powerful than actions.			
A crowd is more powerful than an individual.			
Power is always a dangerous thing.			
A good leader puts the needs of the people ahead of their personal needs.			
When you know that something dangerous is going to happen, you have a duty to try to prevent it.			



**NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_

## ACTIVITY 2: COMPARING TEXTS

*Julius Caesar* was written in 1599 - over 400 years ago. We still perform Shakespeare plays today because he understood how people behave and interact with each other. Most theatre companies, however, make changes to the text he wrote to update references that don't make sense 400 years later or to make the plays shorter for a 21st century audience.

Read the texts below and identify what changes were made to the speech for this performance. Mark the changes with a pen/pencil (circle any word changes, draw a line through lines we cut). With a group, discuss why you think we made these changes. Why do they matter? What lines do you think are most important? If you were staging this play, what would you do with this speech?

### ORIGINAL VERSION

#### Cassius:

Why, man, he doth bestride the narrow world  
Like a Colossus, and we petty men  
Walk under his huge legs and peep about  
To find ourselves dishonourable graves.  
Men at some time are masters of their fates:  
The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars,  
But in ourselves, that we are underlings.  
Brutus and Caesar: what should be in that 'Caesar'?  
Why should that name be sounded more than yours?  
Write them together, yours is as fair a name;  
Sound them, it doth become the mouth as well;  
Weigh them, it is as heavy; conjure with 'em,  
Brutus will start a spirit as soon as Caesar.  
Now, in the names of all the gods at once,  
Upon what meat doth this our Caesar feed,  
That he is grown so great? Age, thou art shamed!  
Rome, thou hast lost the breed of noble bloods!  
When went there by an age, since the great flood,  
But it was famed with more than with one man?  
When could they say till now, that talk'd of Rome,  
That her wide walls encompass'd but one man?  
Now is it Rome indeed and room enough,  
When there is in it but one only man.  
O, you and I have heard our fathers say,  
There was a Brutus once that would have brook'd  
The eternal devil to keep his state in Rome  
As easily as a king.

### ABRIDGED VERSION (FOR CSF PERFORMANCE)

#### Cassius:

Why, man, he doth bestride the narrow world  
Like a Colossus, and we petty men  
Walk under his huge legs and peep about  
To find ourselves dishonourable graves.  
Men at some time are masters of their fates:  
The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars,  
But in ourselves, that we are underlings.  
Brutus and Caesar: what should be in that 'Caesar'?  
Why should that name be sounded more than yours?  
Write them together, yours is as fair a name;  
Sound them, it doth become the mouth as well;  
Weigh them, it is as heavy;  
Upon what meat doth this our Caesar feed,  
That he is grown so great?

**How is Cassius persuading Brutus in the speech?**

**What is the difference between persuasion and manipulation?**



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# After the Performance: Discussion Questions

- Research shows that in 81% of planned violence, someone other than the perpetrator knew it was going to happen. Which characters in the play knew about the planned attack on Caesar before it happened? Who had a chance to step in to prevent it, did they try, and why or why not?
- What were the warning signs or omens that things were not right in Rome prior to Caesar's assassination? If you were a citizen of Rome, what might have tipped you off that something dangerous was about to happen?
- Read the full play, and imagine you will cut the play down to 45 minutes. Discuss what you would leave out and what you would need to keep. What do you see as the heart of the play?
- *Julius Caesar* is a play without clear heroes, and the audience is left with no character to root for - just people making mistakes, choosing violence, and getting stuck. What is the value of watching a play in which characters make mistakes? Do you learn more from a play in which characters behave badly, or in which characters behave well?
- What is empathy? Why is it important? How might empathy have changed the outcomes in the play?
- "An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind." What does this mean to you? Can you think of examples of this idea in *Julius Caesar*?
- In the play we see many examples of persuasive speeches. How is language used to change people's minds? Have you ever been persuaded by someone with a powerful command of language to do something you wouldn't normally do?
- Discuss the terms "herd intoxication" and "mob mentality." Where do we see examples of this in the play? Do people behave differently in a group than when they are alone?
- What were some examples of positive, supportive relationships in the play?
- What were some examples of negative, unsupportive relationships?
- Actors use teamwork to trust one another when they are onstage. How is teamwork useful in school?
- How could you apply what you've learned here in your school? How could you apply this outside of school? If you were aware that someone planned to harm others, how could you safely take action?

## YOUTH VIOLENCE STATISTICS

- 5% of students in this country miss school each day because of bullying. That translates to 160,000 students missing school daily.
- 57% of the time, bullying stops in 10 seconds or less when a bystander becomes an upstander.
- 20-25% of middle school students have been bullied in the past 30 days.
- In 2019, approximately 37% of middle and high school students reported experiencing cyberbullying in their lifetime, and 30% within the last 30 days (Source: Cyberbullying Research Center)
- More info: [stopbullying.gov](http://stopbullying.gov)



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# Cyberbullying

(from the Cyberbullying Research Center)

Cyberbullying is bullying that takes place over digital devices like cell phones, computers, and tablets. Cyberbullying can occur through SMS, Text, and apps, or online in social media, forums, or gaming where people can view, participate in, or share content. Cyberbullying includes sending, posting, or sharing negative, harmful, false, or mean content about someone else. It can include sharing personal or private information about someone else causing embarrassment or humiliation. Some cyberbullying crosses the line into unlawful or criminal behavior.

Cyberbullying has unique concerns in that it can be:

**Persistent** – Digital devices offer an ability to immediately and continuously communicate 24 hours a day, so it can be difficult for children experiencing cyberbullying to find relief.

**Permanent** – Most information communicated electronically is permanent and public, if not reported and removed. A negative online reputation, including for those who bully, can impact college admissions, employment, and other areas of life.

**Hard to Notice** – Because teachers and parents may not overhear or see cyberbullying taking place, it is harder to recognize.

## Tips from CSPV

### HOW TO BE AN UPSTANDER

- Refuse to join in if someone tries to get you to taunt and torment another person.
- Get a teacher, parent, or other responsible adult to come help. This isn't snitching. You are saying that you don't think bullying is acceptable and don't want anyone to get hurt.
- Try to get the person being bullied to tell a trusted adult. Offer to go with them.
- Tell a trusted adult yourself if the person being bullied is unwilling to report it. Do not let the person behaving as a bully know so that they do not become aggressive toward you.

### SCHOOL CLIMATE SURVEYS

One of the most important components of a safe school is a climate where youth feel secure and supported in their learning environment. As part of the Safe Communities Safe Schools (SCSS) project, the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence offers school climate surveys, at a low cost, with options for students, staff, and parents. For more information about our surveys or to administer any of the SCSS Surveys at your school, please contact us via email at [cspv@colorado.edu](mailto:cspv@colorado.edu) or by phone at 303-492-1032.

<https://cspv.colorado.edu/what-we-do/surveys/>

## safe<sup>2</sup>tell Colorado

**SAFE2TELL** is an anonymous tip-line for reporting bullying and other inappropriate behavior. You can use your voice to make the life of someone else better. Sometimes if YOU don't speak up for someone, no one else will. You can make a difference. When you make a call or go online to report bullying, no one will ever be able to know that you are giving the tip. No names are asked, and phone calls to Safe2Tell cannot be traced. It is completely anonymous.

**HOW TO REPORT: (877) 542-7233 | [safe2tell.org](http://safe2tell.org) | Download the mobile app**



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# Standing up to Cyberbullying

## Top Ten Tips for Teens

Sameer Hinduja, Ph.D. and Justin W. Patchin, Ph.D.

Don't be a bystander -- stand up to cyberbullying when you see it. Take action to stop something that you know is wrong. These **Top Ten Tips** will give you specific ideas of what **you can do** when you witness cyberbullying.

- 1. REPORT TO SCHOOL.** If the person being cyberbullied is someone from your school, report it to your school. Many have anonymous reporting systems to allow you to let them know what you are seeing without disclosing your identity.
- 2. COLLECT EVIDENCE.** Take a screenshot, save the image or message, or screen-record what you see. It will be easier for an adult to help if they can see -- and have proof of -- exactly what was being said.
- 3. REPORT TO SITE / APP / GAME.** All reputable online environments prohibit cyberbullying and provide easy tools to report violations. Don't hesitate to report; those sites/apps will protect your identity and not "out" you.
- 4. TALK TO A TRUSTED ADULT.** Develop relationships with adults you can trust and count on to help when you (or a friend) experience something negative online. This could be a parent, teacher, counselor, coach, or family friend.
- 5. DEMONSTRATE CARE.** Show the person being cyberbullied that they are not alone. Send them an encouraging text or snap. Take them aside at school and let them know that you have their back.
- 6. WORK TOGETHER.** Gather your other friends and organize a full-court press of positivity. Post kind comments on their wall or under a photo they've posted. Encourage others to help report the harm. There is strength in numbers.
- 7. TELL THEM TO STOP.** If you know the person who is doing the cyberbullying, tell them to knock it off. Explain that it's not cool to be a jerk to others. But say something -- if you remain silent, you are basically telling them that it is ok to do it.
- 8. DON'T ENCOURAGE IT.** If you see cyberbullying happening, don't support it in any way. Don't forward it, don't add emojis in the comments, don't gossip about it with your friends, and don't stand on the sidelines.
- 9. STAY SAFE.** Don't put yourself in harm's way. When your emotions are running high, resist posting something that may escalate the situation. Don't hang out online where most people are cruel. Never physically threaten others.
- 10. DON'T GIVE UP.** Think creatively about what can be done to stop cyberbullying. Brainstorm with others and use everyone's talents to do something epic!

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# Mental Health and Suicide Prevention: How to Talk to Children and Youth

Office of Suicide Prevention, Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment

A suicide death is a traumatic and difficult loss, and the impact of suicide can leave grieving individuals and communities with questions. One of the first questions people often ask is: Why? Why did this person die by suicide?

Suicide is always a complex issue: There is never just one reason why someone will attempt or die by suicide. Learning about a young person's death by suicide often evokes complicated feelings and raises an additional question: How should we talk with children and youth about mental health and suicide prevention?

It is important that adults establish open communication with children and youth to ask about their emotions, their worries, and what gives them hope. Being able to talk about complex and challenging emotions is a way to build and strengthen resilience, coping skills, and connections to caring, trusted adults. Although it can be scary, normalizing these conversations and being empathetic listeners can be the most important first step we can take in preventing suicides among children and youth and in supporting good mental health.

## KEY TERMS

Child: those younger than age 12

Youth: those between ages 13 and 18

Young adults: those between 19 and 24

Young people: all of the above

## Understanding youth stressors

As parents, caregivers, and trusted adults, we can support youth and children with the stressors they face on a daily basis, and that, in rare circumstances, may contribute to suicidal behaviors and attempts. For a young person, factors that could contribute to a suicidal crisis might include a combination of the following:

- stress.
- feeling socially isolated.
- lack of sleep or irregular sleeping patterns.
- exposure to bullying.
- mental health conditions.
- adverse childhood experiences and traumatic experiences.
- discrimination about one's identity (gender identity and/or sexual orientation).
- periods of transition.
- economic stressors.

## How to listen and offer support

In order to have open conversations around mental health with young people, it is important to show that we are listening: Ask questions that show we care, validate emotions, help build problem-solving skills (which is different from solving their problems for them), and make space and time for ongoing conversations.





## SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL

During these conversations, ask open-ended questions about mental health and listen closely and openly to the responses. Possible questions can be:

- Do you ever get sad or lonely? What do you do to feel better?
- Do you ever feel stressed? What do you do to feel less stressed out?
- Do you or your friends ever talk about hurting yourselves or wanting to die?

Sleep is an often overlooked stressor, and lack of sleep or irregular sleeping patterns can be a risk factor for suicide. Ample sleep can protect young people from many negative health consequences. Adults can support a young person's mental health by creating and maintaining healthy sleeping habits. It is recommended that children between the ages of 7 and 12 get 10-11 hours of sleep each night. Adults can help support a healthy sleeping environment by limiting access to social media at night, or by establishing routines that help ensure that a child or youth is getting the appropriate amount of sleep. Getting enough sleep is important for the mental well-being of people of any age!

### Knowing the warning signs and life-saving resources

Although suicide attempts and suicide deaths among youth and children are rare, even one death by suicide is too many. In order to prevent children and youth suicide attempts and deaths, it is important to be aware of the following potential warning signs that can indicate that the young person is severely depressed or having thoughts of suicide:

- Expressing unbearable emotional pain, feeling trapped, or hopelessness.
- Giving away prized possessions.
- Talking or posting on social media about suicide or wanting to die.
- Suddenly becoming calm or cheerful after a long period of depression.
- Looking for a way to kill themselves.
- Telling people "good-bye."
- Saying they wish they could fall asleep and never wake up, or that everyone would be better off without them.
- Change in sleeping patterns (including sleeping too much or too little).

If you are concerned about possible suicide risk for anyone, including a young person, please ask that person if they are thinking of hurting themselves or are having thoughts of suicide. Research clearly shows that talking or asking about suicide will not put the idea of suicide in their head. It shows that you are concerned about them and willing to help. Direct questions like, "Are you having thoughts or suicide?" or "Are you thinking of killing yourself?" are straightforward and ask for a clear yes/no answer.

If someone responds "yes," is important to listen to their emotions and for information about a possible plan, including if the individual has identified how, where, and when they may attempt suicide. When an individual has specific plans regarding suicide, this can indicate a higher risk. No matter the level of specificity, it is important to connect an individual who is considering suicide with a mental health provider or mental health resources as soon as possible.



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**If you are concerned that a loved one is struggling with a mental health crisis, is having thoughts of suicide, or if you just have a gut feeling that something is off, please call Colorado Crisis Services, available 24/7/365 at 1-844-493-8255. A trained crisis counselor will answer your call and help you navigate your situation.**

## **Safer Environments Reduce Suicide Risk**

When we consider how to reduce suicide risk, especially when someone is in a mental health crisis, a crucial first step is to reduce access to lethal means. Many suicide attempts occur with little planning during a short-term crisis, and ensuring that an environment is as safe as possible is essential in preventing potential suicide deaths.

Suicide attempts by firearms are particularly lethal. The majority of firearms used in youth suicides belong to a parent. Securing firearms or temporarily storing them away from the home greatly reduces the risk of a child or youth dying by suicide using a firearm. Safely and securely storing medications and substances also reduces risk. It is also important to continue to be aware of the individual and their environment. If an individual has shared that they are thinking about suicide, learning more about this despair and if they have a plan can also provide important information on how to keep an environment as safe as possible for that individual and everyone else.

## **In It Together**

The best suicide prevention is comprehensive and collaborative. The more that people, organizations, and communities work together to support positive mental health, coping skills, resiliency, and openness around discussing suicide and mental health, the better the result for everyone, including young people. Talking about suicide with those we care about can feel scary, but there are resources in Colorado to help support you, your family, and your community.

## **Helpful Resources:**

**Colorado Office of Suicide Prevention: [www.coosp.org](http://www.coosp.org)**

**Colorado Crisis Services: 1-844-493-8255, [www.coloradocrisiservices.org](http://www.coloradocrisiservices.org). Text TALK to 38255. The Trevor Project: [www.thetrevorproject.org](http://www.thetrevorproject.org) (for LGBTQ+ youth)**

**Colorado School Safety Resource Center: [www.colorado.gov/cssrc](http://www.colorado.gov/cssrc) The Second Wind Fund: [www.thesecondwindfund.org](http://www.thesecondwindfund.org)**

**National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Colorado: [www.namicolorado.org](http://www.namicolorado.org)**

**The Suicide Prevention Coalition of Colorado: [www.suicidepreventioncolorado.org](http://www.suicidepreventioncolorado.org)**

**American Foundation for Suicide Prevention-CO Chapter: [www.afsp.org/chapter/afsp-colorado](http://www.afsp.org/chapter/afsp-colorado) Mental Health Colorado: [www.mentalhealthcolorado.org](http://www.mentalhealthcolorado.org)**

**The Colorado Behavioral Healthcare Council: [www.cbhc.org](http://www.cbhc.org) Youth Mental Health First Aid: [www.MHFACO.org](http://www.MHFACO.org)**

For more information, please contact:

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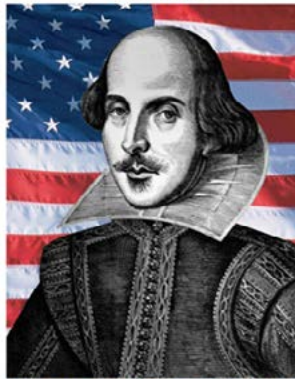
"I can no other answer make but thanks, and thanks, and ever thanks."

*-Twelfth Night*

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